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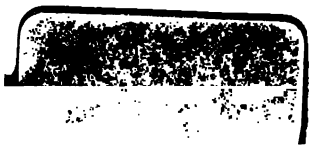

MANNA IN THE HOUSE.

MANNA IN THE HOUSE;

OR,

DAILY EXPOSITIONS

OF

THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES.

Adapted for the use of Families.

BY THE

REV. BARTON BOUCHIER, A.M.,

RECTOR OF FONTHILL BISHOP, WILTS.

"Unus Augustinus præ mille Patribus—
Unus Paulus præ mille Augustinis"—
ET
Unus CHRISTUS præ mille Paulis.

LONDON:

WERTHEIM, MACINTOSH, AND HUNT

24, PATERNOSTER-ROW,

AND 23, HOLLES-STREET, CAVENDISH-SQUARE.

M DCCC LVIII.

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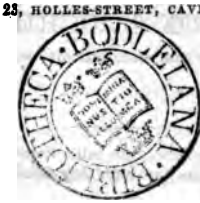
LONDON: WERTHEIM, MACINTOSH, AND HUNT,
24, PATERNOSTER-ROW,
AND 23, HOLLES-STREET, CAVENDISH-SQUARE.



TO THE

HON. AND RIGHT REV. HENRY MONTAGU, LORD BISHOP OF CARLISLE.

My Lord,—

I have a double debt to discharge; first, to thank you for the kind permission to dedicate this volume to your Lordship; and which enables me to discharge also my second debt in the way most acceptable to my own feelings, in thus expressing my grateful sense of the valuable commendation your Lordship has given to the preceding volumes of Manna in the House.

"Laudari à laudato" has, I suspect, my Lord, lost none of its sweetness since the day that human praise first reached the ear or touched the heart of author. And as that

approval which your Lordship bestowed on the former portions of my work has in some measure elicited the present volume, it seems but natural that it should seek to go forth under the same auspices.

I have the honour to remain,

My Lord,

Your obedient and obliged servant,

BARTON BOUCHIER.

The Cottage,
Cheam, Surrey,
March, 1858.

ADVERTISEMENT.

It was not the Author's intention to have continued the volumes of "Manna in the House" beyond the four Gospels. Having at the close of that work undertaken a similar Commentary on the Psalms under the title of "Manna in the Heart," it was his purpose to have carried on the work on the same plan through the prophetical writings.

The Commentary on the Psalms was, however, brought to a conclusion shortly after the death of the late Rector of Cheam had rendered necessary the Author's resignation of the Curacy of that parish, of which he had had the sole charge for nearly twenty years.

The uncertainty of his then position, and the possibility, perhaps the hope, of removal to another sphere of labour were little favourable

to an undertaking requiring all the appliances of a mind undisturbed by anxiety. To these hindrances was added in the course of the last summer a serious and protracted illness, altogether precluding the possibility of labour, at least of literary labour; and the work was accordingly suspended, till it should be the Lord's will that it might be resumed under more favourable circumstances.

The present volume has required but the industry of a few months; and as the preceding volumes had received many a gratifying and encouraging testimony to their usefulness, it seemed a not ungraceful continuation to add this conclusion to the series: and the Author can only hope it may meet with as kind and approving a welcome as its predecessors.

THE COTTAGE, CHEAM, SURREY,
March, 1858.

THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES.

SECTION I.

CHAP. I. 1—8. *The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, until the day in which he was taken up, after that he through the Holy Ghost had given commandments unto the apostles whom he had chosen: To whom also he shewed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God: And, being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of me. For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence. When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel? And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power. But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.*

THIS first portion of the first chapter of the Acts

of the Apostles seems still to linger on the holy theme of the Saviour's Resurrection and Ascension, as if the writer were unwilling to quit it. St. Luke, the undoubted author of this book, had, indeed, closed his Gospel with a brief account of the Ascension of Jesus; how, in the very act of blessing them, He was parted from His disciples, and carried up to heaven: but he here gives a still more circumstantial detail of that most wondrous event, and to the same pious friend, dear to himself as well as dear to God, to whom he had dedicated his Gospel narrative.

And, indeed, while we are reading the earlier portion of this chapter, one cannot realize that we have quitted even the personal history of Jesus. It is His name which forms the subject of the first verse of this first chapter; and, though it is somewhat anticipating the fact, it is the same name, "the Lord Jesus Christ," which occupies the most conspicuous position in the last verse of the last chapter—Jesus, the Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last! One loves to trace how this Name is, as it were, the thread on which every incident of Gospel as well as apostolic history is strung—how the Name of Jesus is the key-note of all that these his followers both did and taught from the day that they through the Holy Ghost had received commandment to go forth and preach repentance and remission of sins in His Name

among all nations, and were endued with power from on high for the purpose.

St. Luke here specifies the period during which Jesus remained on earth after His resurrection. For "forty days" he tarried here; and there might have been moments when these ardent and affectionate followers of their risen Lord may have admitted a hope that the Master whom they loved so dearly would yet abide with them, and be Himself their comforter. As day after day passed by, and week after week went on, and still Jesus lingered, as though unwilling to part from them, they might have indulged the thought, as their question seems to imply, that He would at this time restore the kingdom to Israel, and Himself sit on the throne of his father David. Human hopes, perhaps human ambitions also, mingled with their desire to know; and yet one cannot but perceive a great and manifest change both in the tone and purport of their present question, from their earlier inquiries of the same tendency. And, though Jesus no doubt rebukes, or, perhaps, we should rather say, represses the curiosity, so gentle and so tender is that rebuke, rather diverting than actually forbidding their thoughts, pointing their attention to present duties rather than future hopes, that one rejoices to think how great a change had come over their spirit since the day when they had disputed among themselves which should be the greatest, or when

two of them had ambitiously sought for their own aggrandizement the highest posts in that kingdom. The question of the disciples here recorded, however something of earth and earth's infirmity may have been mixed up with it, seems more to indicate a longing for their Master's exaltation than their own advancement. There is no mention of themselves, no allusion to the posts of honour on the right hand and on the left hand of the Saviour's throne; no such unseemly claim as was once put forward by one of them, "Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee: what shall we have, therefore?"

There can be little doubt that these forty days of the Saviour's stay on earth after his Resurrection were employed by Him in the same way, with regard to all His disciples, as the very first day was with the two chosen ones on their memorable walk to Emmäus, when "He expounded unto them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself." So, here, is it said that "He spake unto them of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God." How tenderly, how carefully, with what consummate wisdom, does the Lord make ready His people for the work He employs them in! And, even with all this, they were still to wait the Lord's time and the Lord's hour ere they set forth on their mission. How sweetly, too, was the injunction to "wait" linked with the recollection of their Lord's promise, as they had

themselves heard it from His own gracious lips. You remember how, on that night of sorrow preceding his Crucifixion, He had said to them, "It is expedient for you that I go away; for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you." And here He reminds them of His own words, "Wait for the promise of the Father, which ye have heard of me." And what a testimony, too, is here given to John the Baptist's mission! "I, indeed," said John, "baptize you with water unto repentance; but He that cometh after me is mightier than I: He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire." And here Jesus adds, "Ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence." It is in these apparently incidental allusions that we find such undoubted confirmation of the preceding history of the four Evangelists; and I think that our previous meditations on the Gospels would be incomplete if we did not carry on our inquiries through this narrative also of the various acts of the Apostles—written, remember, by an Evangelist himself, and one, too, who could say of himself that he had been a sharer in many of the scenes he describes, and of whom we may therefore add, in his own words, in his own Gospel, that "he had perfect understanding of all things from the very first."

SECTION II.

CHAP. I. 9—12. *And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight. And, while they looked stedfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven. Then returned they unto Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is from Jerusalem a Sabbath-day's journey.*

ST. LUKE, in the verses we last considered, intimates one very important and manifest purpose of our Lord's remaining so many days on earth before His final Ascension into heaven. His Crucifixion was well known; *that* had taken place in the sight of the unnumbered multitudes that had assembled at Jerusalem at the Passover, and very probably, too, had been recorded amid the Roman annals of the empire. His Resurrection, on the contrary, for wise and unerring purposes, had been witnessed by no human eye. The Roman Guards that trembled at the earthquake and the angel that came down from heaven and rolled away the stone from the sepulchre, saw not the risen Jesus; and even of the first visitants at the grave, their report was founded on no testimony of their own eye-sight, and therefore seemed but as idle tales. But this tarrying of

Jesus upon earth for forty days placed the fact of the Resurrection on indisputable ground. It was no hasty glance that they had of their risen Master; it was not like that early interview vouchsafed to the two disciples at Emmäus, in which, during its greater period, their eyes were holden that they should not know Him; and immediately that the veil was withdrawn, and they recognised Him, He vanished out of their sight. It was not as when He presented Himself to the sorrowing Mary of Magdala, and forbade her to touch Him. It was not as when the angel of the Lord appeared to Manoah and his wife, and they knew not who he was, till he "ascended in the flame of the altar, and appeared no more." For forty days was Jesus seen of His disciples; they conversed with Him, they ate with Him, they touched and handled Him; He had breathed on them; and, as Luke here says, "by many infallible proofs"—proofs that could not deceive nor mislead men that had ears and eyes and hands and senses—"He showed Himself alive"—to one alone—to two together—to the whole surviving band of His apostles in their solitary chamber at Jerusalem, barred and bolted as it was—on the shores of the Sea of Galilee, when He solemnly re-admitted the repentant and forgiven Peter to the apostleship—and, finally, as if to put the evidence of the Resurrection beyond the possi-

bility of doubt or cavil, beyond all suspicion of collusion or deception of the senses, He was seen, as St. Paul tells us, by above five hundred brethren at once. And I think there can be little doubt that the occasion to which St. Paul alludes, of so many brethren being assembled together in the presence of their risen Lord, must have been when, as Luke tells us in his Gospel, "He led them out as far as to Bethany, and, while He blessed them, was parted from them, and carried up into heaven,"—or as he more minutely describes the scene in the verses we have just read.

It had been our Lord's own declaration to one of those disciples, at the very beginning of His ministry, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Hereafter shall ye see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man;" and there can be no doubt that Nathanael or Bartholomew was among the number who, on that day, on the Mount of Olivet, were so intently and "stedfastly looking towards heaven," as their glorified Master ascended, the clouds His chariot, and the angels His attendant ministers, into the presence of His expecting Father.

Perhaps, at the first reading of the account of the ascension of Jesus, one is somewhat disappointed, if we may dare to say so, at the extreme simplicity of the narrative and the scantiness of

its details. One seems to have somewhat of that spirit of Naaman the Syrian, when it was said to him, "Go, and wash in Jordan seven times." One almost expects to have seen heaven opened in the sight of an astonished and awe-struck world, and the armies of heaven pouring out their hosts to welcome their returning Lord, while men's hearts were failing them for fear. But how completely at variance with all the purposes of the Lord's dispensations, and with their usual manifestations to the world, as well as the whole current of the Bible narrative! Man's walk was still to be by faith, and not by sight; and though sufficient publicity was afforded to prevent the possibility of doubt, and witnesses enough chosen to give unerring testimony to the fact, yet "God showed Him openly" only "to witnesses chosen before of God, and not to all the people."

And yet, even in this scanty compass of three verses, in which the historian details the scene, how sublime every portion of it—a cloud from heaven descending for his chariot, and the angels of God having it in charge to bear him up in their hands, while two of the heavenly host in their stainless robes are commissioned to stay behind, and tell of a still more glorious day and scene than even that on which they were gazing. And is there not something most touching in that sweet, though simple expression, "this same

Jesus"? Yes! the same Jesus, whom they had so loved and followed, and who had so loved them—who had so ministered to their necessities and so borne with their ignorances and infirmities! —"this same Jesus" whom they had seen hanging on the cross, whom they had beheld laid in the grave, as they thought "to see corruption," and whom they now beheld ascending in the clouds of heaven and amid attendant angels, while the everlasting doors were thrown open to welcome in the King of Glory!—yes, "this same Jesus," still in fashion as a man, with the prints of the nails in his hands and feet, and the thrust of the spear in his side, "as a Lamb that had been slain," shall again appear coming in the clouds of heaven. It is "this same Jesus" into whose name we are baptized, under whose banner we are enrolled, and who has loved us with an everlasting love—this same Jesus will not only be "our guide unto death," but "afterwards receive us to glory." Well may we exclaim, "Whom have I in heaven but thee, and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee."

SECTION III.

CHAP. I. 13, 14. *And when they were come in, they went up into an upper-room, where abode both Peter, and James, and John, and Andrew, Philip, and Thomas, Bartholomew, and Matthew, James the son of Alpheus, and Simon Zelotes, and Judas the brother of James. These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren.*

I THINK the conduct of these disciples after the ascension of their Lord is a very striking illustration of the Scripture precept, "Wait on the Lord—wait, I say, on the Lord," as well as of the Scripture promise, "They that wait on the Lord shall renew their strength." Humanly speaking, one can hardly understand the quiet silence which the followers of Jesus observed with respect to the great and glorious event they had so recently witnessed upon Mount Olivet. As they returned to Jerusalem, as St. Luke himself tells us in his Gospel, "with great joy," like those two disciples from Emmäus, one can well imagine them saying one to another, "Did not our hearts burn within us, while He blessed us, and as He parted from us;" and one would have supposed that the very first outburst of their enraptured hearts to the first, and, indeed, to every one they met, would

have been, "The Lord is gone up on high, and we have seen Him go into heaven."

But it was not so. Beyond the emotions of their own hearts, or the expression one to another of what was passing in those hearts, and the pouring out of their continued supplication and thanksgiving to God in and through that loved name, which they were now empowered to use in every prayer, there was no outward manifestation of anything that was going on amid that band of disciples. For aught the Pharisees and Sadducees could know—for aught that Annas or Caiaphas could tell or Herod dream of—for aught that passed in Pilate's inmost conscience, all seemed to be hushed and at an end; and it is more than probable that they, one and all, began to think they had for ever silenced the rumours of the Resurrection.

But they had not silenced prayer, nor that patient looking up to God which awaited only "the promise of the Father," and His signal to go forth and preach the doctrine of a crucified but risen Saviour. And most assuredly to them was realised the Lord's own assurance, "In quietness and confidence shall be your strength."

There is something very striking in the immediate resource of prayer to which these followers of the Lord Jesus betook themselves on their return from Mount Olivet and its stupendous

scenes. It is said in the preceding verse, "Then returned they to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet;" and it is added, in the one immediately following, "When they were come in, they went up into an inner room"—probably the very room where they had sat with Jesus at the last Passover, so hallowed by the associations and remembrances of that sorrowing evening, and which, belonging in all probability to one of the many disciples of Jesus in Jerusalem, the Apostles had evidently made their home during this temporary sojourn in that city—and there, it is added, they "continued with one accord in prayer and supplication." I believe the full heart of a child of God, as much in times of overflowing joy as in seasons of deep sorrow, turns with instinctive impulse to the source of all, and can alone find vent in pouring out its emotions in prayer and thanksgiving. It is the natural outlet of a child's overpowering feelings to tell all to a loving God, who as a tender Father enters alike into the joys and sorrows of His children.

Among those who were assembled in this upper room on this occasion, we find the name of Mary the mother of Jesus. It is the only time her name is mentioned, after Jesus had so touchingly commended her to the care of the disciple whom He loved. From henceforth all Scripture is silent respecting her; and I would just remark on this mention of her name here, that so far from prece-

dence or superiority, even such as we might naturally have expected, being assigned to her in the narrative itself, it is just the contrary, for her name is mentioned after those of all the Apostles, and, indeed, after the other "women" of that little band. I can well believe that in that room, and in the heart of every disciple of Jesus, deference and reverential regard were shown to her by each and all. Her relationship to their own beloved Lord, the sorrows which had pierced that mother's heart, and the solemn bequeathing of her to the care and filial love of John, which, of course, implied and secured the kindness of all, no doubt won for her a peculiar interest and regard. But no superiority is accorded her, and none is claimed.

"Mary the Mother of Jesus" is indeed and ever will be "blessed among women," and held in everlasting honour; but Mary herself lays claim to no precedence nor higher interest in the court of heaven than the rest. Alike united in purpose, they all with one accord join in prayer together; and from that hour the page of Scriptural history is closed upon the mother of Jesus. I think it is a significant silence, in no degree, in no one jot nor tittle derogating from nor diminishing the veneration in which Mary should be held, but most pointedly and distinctly implying that no more should be given to her.

SECTION IV.

CHAP. I. 15—20. *And in those days Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples, and said, (the number of the names together were about an hundred and twenty,) Men and brethren, This scripture must needs have been fulfilled, which the Holy Ghost, by the mouth of David, spake before concerning Judas, which was guide to them that took Jesus. For he was numbered with us, and had obtained part of this ministry. Now this man purchased a field with the reward of iniquity; and falling headlong, he burst asunder in the midst, and all his bowels gushed out. And it was known unto all the dwellers at Jerusalem; insomuch as that field is called, in their proper tongue, Aceldama, that is to say, The field of blood. For it is written in the book of Psalms, Let his habitation be desolate, and let no man dwell therein; and his bishopric let another take.*

IN the course of the ten days which intervened between the ascension of Jesus and the day of Pentecost, we here read of Peter proposing to a large body of the disciples, who were met together for purposes connected with their future mission, the substitution of another member in the Apostolic band in the place of their former treacherous associate, Judas. Peter was probably the senior in age, and his own character, fervent in zeal and always first and foremost in his Master's work, concurred, no doubt, with the direction of the Holy Ghost, in assigning to him the lead on the present occasion. His address to the assembled

disciples is very striking, as well as appropriate; and one at once recognises how Peter recalled to his own mind those solemn words of Jesus, uttered probably in the same room, on the night preceding His crucifixion, in that most touching of all prayers, and in which, in reference to His disciples, He says, "Those that Thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition, that the Scripture might be fulfilled;" and it is with the same awful truth that Peter here begins, "This Scripture must needs have been fulfilled, which the Holy Ghost by the mouth of David spake before concerning Judas."

It is a fearful thought that as God is not unfaithful to His promises, so neither is He unfaithful to His threatenings; and, as some one remarks, could we descend into the abodes of the lost, the cry and the confession from every inmate there would be, "The Scripture is fulfilled." And, alas! too, in the case of Judas, as in many another instance, we see that no outward privileges can avail without the hidden life of the soul. No mere station in the Church, however distinguished or favourable for the growth of grace, can supersede or set aside the want of grace in the heart. Judas had enjoyed every opportunity of personal communion with his Master for probably nearly three years, and yet no real change, no actual conversion of the heart to God, had ensued: the idol of covetous-

ness still held its throne, and lured him on to eternal ruin. He had, indeed, been numbered with the disciples, and had obtained part of their ministry; yet, like too many of his own countrymen, who, though of Israel, yet were not Israel, so Judas, though an Apostle by name and office, yet had no part nor lot in the matter, for his heart was not right with God. It is a sad aggravation of condemnation to perish amid the means of grace, and, like that Israelitish lord in the gate of Samaria, to be set over the distribution of food to others, and yet be trampled under foot himself for his unbelief!

Peter here mentions circumstances connected with the death of Judas which are not detailed in the Gospel narrative, but which are in no way inconsistent with the account given by St. Matthew, the only evangelist who mentions the suicide of Judas. And I think that Peter here names these additional horrors to shew how literally and truly the Scripture was fulfilled in the traitor's case. He is quoting the 109th Psalm, and we there read, in the 18th verse, the curse denounced upon him, that it should "come into his bowels like water, and like oil into his bones," which evidently refers to the legal curse recorded in the book of Numbers, "The Lord make thee a curse among thy people, when the Lord doth make thy belly to swell and thy thigh to rot;" and so here we read, in literal fulfilment of the curse, "he fell

headlong, and, bursting asunder in the midst, all his bowels gushed out."

Nor did this occur in any distant or secluded nook, unseen or unknown of any; it was known to every dweller in Jerusalem,—it must have been the common topic of conversation in connexion with the crucifixion of Jesus. Judas had been guide to the armed band that took Jesus; he was the hired traitor of the High Priest, and in their very presence and hearing the conscience-stricken man had flung back the blistering wages of his sin. And still more to perpetuate the memory of his death, these very priests, with infatuated blindness, purchase with the money a field for public burial, and affix to it a name in their own language that should stamp in indelible characters its blood-stained origin, and so once more become the unconscious instruments of the fulfilment of Scripture, in thus buying "the potter's field to bury strangers in."

Let me earnestly impress on you that we, too, may become unconscious, but still accurate fulfillers of Scripture. I do not say that you are pointed out so unerringly and distinctly as Judas or these priests and Pharisees were; but the Scripture has said, and that Scripture must be fulfilled in each one of us, that the Gospel of Jesus Christ, while it is a savour of life unto life to some, is a savour of death unto death to others, and that it is alike fulfilling its mission both

in them that are saved and in them that perish.

SECTION V.

CHAP. I. 21—26. *Wherefore of these men which have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out amongst us, beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that he was taken up from us, must one be ordained to be a witness with us of his resurrection. And they appointed two, Joseph, called Barsabas, who was surnamed Justus, and Matthias. And they prayed, and said, Thou, Lord, which knowest the hearts of all men, shew whether of these two thou hast chosen, that he may take part of this ministry and apostleship, from which Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place. And they gave forth their lots; and the lot fell upon Matthias; and he was numbered with the eleven apostles.*

PETER now proceeds to the more definite purpose of the day's meeting—the appointment of a successor to the apostleship of Judas, from which he by transgression had fallen; and he again refers to the same Scripture in the 109th Psalm for their direction and guidance in this matter. It is a good rule to look to God's own Word as our guide in all things, but even then we must sanctify our search, as Peter did here, by prayer. To pray that we may know the Lord's will, and may have grace and strength also to follow it when known,

are the best rules that I know of to keep us straight in our Christian course. As Sedgwick observes, "No rule but God's Word, no end but God's glory."*

This is the first recorded conclave of the Apostolic body assembled together for purposes of business; and it is interesting to remark with what wisdom and regularity, what prudence and discretion, what piety and devotion, everything was conducted by the then infant Church: and how evidently they had already drank of the spirit of Jesus, and were even now under the teaching of the Holy Ghost. Jesus had breathed on them, and said, "Receive ye the Holy Ghost:" as in the beginning He had breathed into man's nostrils the breath of life, so had He already given unto them the earnest of that more abundant outpouring of the Holy Spirit, which in a few days more was visibly to descend on them, and which we now read was so manifestly guiding and directing their counsels.

The prayer, too, with which they enter upon their work is the first recorded prayer to their ascended Lord: no doubt they had prayed many a time before, when it is said of them all, that "they continued with one accord in prayer and supplication;" but this is the first time we find the very words of the prayer, which they addressed to Jesus,—for to Him, no doubt, was it addressed,

* Sedgwick on 23d Psalm, p. 152. 1658.

—and it is worth while to notice with what unhesitating language they ascribe to Jesus not only the title but the very attributes of God, "Thou, Lord, which knowest the hearts of all men." It is the very distinction, which Jehovah claims to himself, "I, the Lord, search the heart, I try the reins;" as Solomon in his prayer so emphatically acknowledges, "Thou, even thou only, knowest the hearts of all the children of men." It was Jesus who had originally chosen every member of the little band of the Apostles, and you remember how on that occasion He had passed the whole preceding night in prayer, and how Himself, with reference to the twelve tribes of Israel, had appointed that number to be the more immediate heads of his Church. One was now withdrawn, and it was deemed necessary to supply his place with another, who had known the Lord from the beginning, to be a witness with the rest of His resurrection.

It was, no doubt, a post of honour, though one of peril and persecution; but we see no unseemly eagerness for the one, no timid shrinking from the other. Of those hundred and twenty disciples assembled in that room, many and many a brother might have been selected who would have been willing to follow their Lord to prison and to death—there were those on whom the eye of human discernment would have rested as peculiarly fitted for the work; and one almost

seems to anticipate that Joseph or Nicodemus, who had so boldly gone to Pilate and begged the body of Jesus for burial, would have been the chosen honoured one. But it was not so—neither Joseph nor Nicodemus had companied with that band of brothers all the time that Jesus went in and out among them; but, as far as we know, had kept aloof, and, like Mark in after days, had rather departed from them and went not with them to the work.

And yet how different the honour which cometh from God to that which cometh from man! Of these two names here singled out for selection from the rest, and the one so especially and signally chosen of God, we have never heard before, nor do we find mention of their names again, save that Barsabas is once incidentally mentioned as a messenger from the Church at Jerusalem to the Church at Antioch. Nothing is recorded or known of either, and yet their names will be held in everlasting remembrance, for God's book on earth, and the Lamb's Book of Life in heaven, are the imperishable archives in which the names of Matthias and Barsabas are written.

I would just make one remark on the mode of election by lot; it seems to our notions and habits to partake too much of what the world calls 'by chance' ever to have place among ourselves in matters of solemn and serious import. But it was not so among the Jews, nor among Oriental

nations generally, and God had set His especial seal on its use among His own people by declaring that "the whole disposing of the lot was of Him." At any rate, I think we can never err, if in matters of importance, we too, solemnly and sincerely, seek the Lord's will in prayer, and thus commit our ways unto Him, leaving the result calmly and confidently in His hands.

SECTION VI.

CHAP. II. 1—3. *And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them.*

THE disciples had with their own eyes seen the Lord ascend into heaven, and with their own ears had heard the heavenly messenger assure them not only of the fact, but of His return from thence on some future day. They, therefore, could have no doubt where their loved Lord and Master was; they could not for a moment have hesitated to declare, as indeed they boldly did, that "the heavens had received Him until the times of the restitution of all things;" but still there might have been

doubts and fears and uncertainties as to what that Master might have it in His power to do, or how far His absence could be supplied to them. He had, indeed, told them that one of the purposes of His departure was to send the Comforter or Holy Spirit to them; that if He went not away, the Comforter would not come; and He then added, "But if I depart, I will send him unto you;" and on the eve of His ascension, He had bidden them tarry at Jerusalem, till they should receive the accomplishment of His promise.

But day after day had passed—a whole week had elapsed—and a second was hastening on to its close, and no signal of the Lord's fulfilment of His purpose had yet been given. They were still tarrying in Jerusalem afar from their homes and occupations,—still abiding, at least some of them, in that upper room in which we first met them, and no doubt anxiously awaiting the Lord's time when the seal should be removed from their lips, and they might go forth and tell all the great things they had seen and heard, and that once more the streets and synagogues and Temple of Jerusalem might resound with "Hosannah to the son of David. Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord."

This day of Pentecost, therefore, must have been a sweet evidence to their soul of their risen Lord's truth, and power, and love. The whole of

the scene, as described in these earlier verses of the chapter, is a lovely picture of a Christian assembly meeting in the name of Jesus on the Christian Sabbath. It was on the first day of the week that this Feast of Pentecost was held, and one cannot but gratefully recognise how unmistakeably the Lord not simply put honour on, but sealed as it were with His own signet and approval, the change of day from the Jewish to the Christian Sabbath, by selecting that day for the two most important events of the Christian's faith, His own resurrection, and the outpouring of His Holy Spirit. One only wonders how persons can argue and attempt to persuade themselves and others, that they see no traces of the Christian Sabbath in the New Testament. I could almost say that so far from there being no traces, it seems to me ushered in with more of pomp and splendour and outward circumstance, than when the Sabbath was re-promulgated on Mount Sinai. If at Sinai the people trembled, so at the sepulchre, when the earthquake rolled away the stone from its door, the keepers did tremble, and became as dead men; if the law was given by the ministry of angels, so at the tomb of Jesus angels ministered also. If the mountain burned with fire when the Jewish Sabbath was enacted, so on this day of Pentecost, on this Christian Sabbath, cloven tongues of fire appeared and rested on each; so that we may truly say,

"God has not left himself without witness" in this matter of the Christian Sabbath.*

I think, too, there is a peculiar significance attached to the expression, that they were all assembled together "with one accord." No longer any disputes which should be the greatest, no burning jealousies or angry offence at the precedence of one over another, no claims of superiority of Apostles over disciples, no lording it over the brethren, but the whole body—and we find in the last chapter there were a hundred and twenty brethren—were all of one soul and spirit. They had been, no doubt, a good deal engaged in social prayer, and probably had again met on this day for the same purpose, and might have been actually engaged in prayer; and nothing so binds in closest links, nothing so dispels asperity and unkindness, as union in prayer.

It is said of two of the most bitter disputants of the last century,† though otherwise men of

* It is a remarkable coincidence, which is mentioned by Lamy in his "Biblicus Apparatus," that "the law was given on Mount Sinai on the sixth day of the month Sivan, that is to say, the fiftieth day after the Israelites came out of Egypt, and the celebration of the first Passover; and the Holy Ghost was pleased to display his influences on the same day (the day of Pentecost), because He engraves that law upon the heart, which Moses gave them engraven only upon stone." —*Père Lamy's App. Bib.* (*translated by Bundy*), *p.* 133. 1723.

† Fletcher of Madeley, and Augustus Toplady.

genuine piety and true Christian feeling, that, acrimonious as their published writings were against each other, yet, on once meeting and kneeling down together in prayer, they forgot every difference, and only recognised in each other a brother beloved in the Lord. The fruits of the Spirit are love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, meekness; and prayer was a fitting prelude to the outpouring of that Holy Spirit, which was now to be made manifest in this loving band of brethren.

SECTION VII.

CHAP. II. 4—13. *And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. And there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven. Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language. And they were all amazed, and marvelled, saying one to another, Behold, are not all these which speak Galileans? And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born? Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, and in Judæa, and Cappadocia, in Pontus, and Asia, Phrygia, and Pamphylia, in Egypt, and in the parts of Libya about Cyrene, and strangers of Rome, Jews and proselytes, Cretes and Arabians, we do hear them speak in our tongues the won-*

derful works of God. And they were all amazed, and were in doubt, saying one to another, What meaneth this? Others mocking said, These men are full of new wine.

Two thousand years had swept over the world since God had confounded man's speech at Babel, and for His own wise purposes had ordained that speech and language should be as diversified as clime and race. It was not simply to confound and overthrow the structure on the plains of Shinar,—an earthquake, or a thunderbolt, or the hurricane could have effected that,—but for far more enduring and extended results was this diversity of speech intended.

And yet even as regarded Babel, it was a solemn and expressive mockery that the Lord stamped upon that atheistic attempt of man to rear by his own skill and intellect a tower that should reach to heaven. How they strove and toiled, and united in hand and heart to add stone to stone and story to story! And as tier after tier arose, and the building progressed in height, amid the exultation of its architects, they might have laughed to scorn the warning that spoke of God. But in one instant all was at an end; man gazed on his fellow-man as on a stranger's face. They spake, indeed, one to another, but there was none to answer, nor any that could understand,—all was dissonance, confusion, and dismay, and, in the expressive language of Scripture, "the Lord scattered them abroad from thence upon the face

of all the earth," a lasting monument and memorial how the Lord had those proud and defiant builders in derision!

But now on this day of Pentecost was to be made known that "mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure, which He had purposed in Himself, that in the dispensation of the fulness of times He might gather together in one all things in Christ." And as, humanly speaking, this diversity of speech was the great hindrance to the communication of these glad tidings to "every nation under heaven," so in this outpouring of the Holy Ghost, wherewith they were filled, its first visible and audible manifestation was that "they began to speak with other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance."* And to render the miracle more observed of all, to spread its knowledge far and wide, and in some degree prepare men's minds for the heavenly message which was about to reach the nations of the earth, each in its own language, God had so timed the miracle, if we may so express it, that, as the historian significantly remarks, there were assembled in

* This itself was a wonderful work of God, that the same means of divers tongues which was the destroying of Babel should be made use of to work the building of Sion—that the same means that scattered mankind from the Tower of Confusion should bring them back again to the Fold of Unity, that so the curse might be taken away, and a blessing come in its place."—DUKES' *Sermons*.

Jerusalem at this very time strangers from every quarter of the known and habitable globe—Asia, and Africa, and the more distant Europe, had alike contributed their witnesses to this miracle; and however the Jews and inhabitants of Jerusalem might be unconscious of the work, and not able to detect or recognise the various dialects and languages of the world in what to them might seem only a mere discord and confusion of sound and utterance, yet neither in this instance also did God leave Himself without a witness, but out of every nation under heaven did He especially summon to Jerusalem those who should carry back to their own lands the glorious intelligence that they had actually seen with their own eyes, and heard with their own ears, men speaking in their own tongue the wonderful works of God, and who had declared themselves commissioned of their Master to go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature. That commission had been given to them by Jesus Christ before His ascension, and no doubt its solemn import was deeply and indelibly impressed on the disciples' minds: they were even now waiting at Jerusalem for the Lord's signal to commence the work, and yet we read of no expression of doubt or wonder how they were to accomplish it. They never seem to have asked themselves or one another; one almost is inclined to think the question had never suggested itself to their minds how

they were to discharge the duty or prepare themselves for it. They had, indeed, heard their Lord say, with respect to the persecutions and trials that should befall themselves, "Take no thought what ye shall speak, neither premeditate, for it shall be given you what ye shall say;" and then it was added, "for it is not ye that shall speak, but the Holy Ghost." But that was a very different promise from any that could meet such a commission as enjoined them to go to every people, and nation, and language that dwell in all the earth, and preach the Gospel to every creature. And yet the difficulty never seems to have startled them—never appears to have given them a moment's uneasiness or apprehension, but with calm reliance they seem to have waited in the full confidence that He who issued the command would give the ability also to execute it.

I think we may learn a very important lesson from this. We are so apt to say, or perhaps rather to think, of the path of duty, "It is so hard—so very difficult—so almost impossible,—who is sufficient for these things?" The resistance of sin, the solicitations of companions, the suggestions of our own evil hearts, the attractions of the world, the straightforward walking in the narrow way without turning to the right hand or to the left—all these, and a thousand other things, are no doubt difficult. The cutting off a right hand or foot, or the plucking out a right eye, are

difficult and painful also; and our Lord meant us to feel and to know this, that we might at once go to the source of all strength. If the duty is of God, He will give strength; if it be His will, He will find the way, and smooth the rugged path for the willing feet. As our own proverb says, "Duties are ours, results are God's."

SECTION VIII.

CHAP. II. 14—21. *But Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice, and said unto them, Ye men of Judæa, and all ye that dwell at Jerusalem, be this known unto you, and hearken to my words: for these are not drunken, as ye suppose, seeing it is but the third hour of the day. But this is that which is spoken by the prophet Joel; And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams: and on my servants and on my haindmaidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit; and they shall prophesy: and I will shew wonders in heaven above, and signs on the earth beneath; blood, and fire, and vapour of smoke: the sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before that great and notable day of the Lord come: And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved.*

ONE can hardly recognise the once-timid disciple in the High Priest's hall quailing before a ser-

vant's challenge and a maiden's scrutiny, in the bold, unhesitating Apostle in the present chapter. Not two months ago Peter had shrunk from owning that he had ever known the man Jesus; and now, in the midst of the assembled crowds whom the report of this miracle of the gift of tongues had brought together—amid the jeers and derision of his own countrymen, who denounced him and his brethren as a company of drunkards, in the same spirit that they had once said of Jesus, "Behold a man gluttonous and a wine-bibber,"—this same Apostle "stands up," and in the presence of all declares "that same Jesus, whom they had crucified, both Lord and Christ." One can hardly say which was the greater miracle, or which more evidently manifested the power of the Holy Ghost, for we may truly say of this first Christian sermon that was ever preached in the name of the crucified Jesus, "It was not Peter that spake, but the Holy Ghost."

It is said here, "Peter standing up with the eleven," including, of course, the newly-elected Apostle Matthias, the once more unbroken band of twelve, who had "companied together all the time that the Lord Jesus had gone in and out among them;" but there can be no doubt, I think, that this expression is not meant to intimate that this outpouring of the Holy Ghost and miraculous gift of tongues had been confined to

the twelve Apostles alone, and not extended to the whole band of disciples who were assembled together on that day with such unity of purpose and of spirit. The whole tenor of the succeeding history shows that it was no such limited effusion of the Spirit, but that it was given unto all and upon all that band of believers. I think, too, we are justified in supposing that this place where on this feast of Pentecost they were assembled, was not in that upper room where they had used to meet on ordinary occasions, but in some one of the courts or chambers of the Temple, or, it may be, in one of the many synagogues of Jerusalem, and that, as the rumour spread of what had occurred, how fiery shapes from heaven had rested on them, "the multitude came together," and not only saw, but "heard every man speaking in his own language."

We are not sufficiently acquainted with the Jewish ritual or service in those days, but we know that not only was Moses read in the synagogue every Sabbath day, but the roll of the Prophets was also kept in it, and handed by the ruler of the synagogue to the reader or person selected to officiate. It was in this manner that that most striking passage of Isaiah was read in the synagogue of Nazareth by Jesus Himself; and it is more than probable that this passage of Joel, to which St. Peter refers, had been read

that day as the appointed portion of Holy Writ,* and is therefore so pointedly and appropriately made, as it were, the text of Peter's sermon on this occasion. As if he had said, "Ye have this day heard in your own Scriptures how God has declared of old by the mouth of his prophet Joel, that in these last days—these last days of that dispensation under which you have so long lived, but which are now to come to an end, He would pour out His Spirit upon all flesh—not alone on your sons and your daughters, your young men and maidens, and old men, but on all flesh; and yourselves well know how all this is referred by every teacher to the days of the Messiah. If, then, this, which was predicted by Joel, has now come to pass, as you see and hear it has, then, according to the teaching of your own scribes and lawyers, are the days of the Messiah come."

How truly, too, might the dauntless apostle, as a fitting prelude to the latter part of Joel's prophecy, have gone on to say, in the words of Habakkuk, "Take heed lest that be said of you, as was said of others, 'I will work a work in your days, which ye will not believe, though it be told you,' yea, though ye see it with your eyes, and

* "This portion from Joel is read in the service of the Karaite Jews on the day of Pentecost, from which it is probable that it was read on that day in the time of the Apostles."—Note in loc. comment. from Henry and Scott, Religious Tract Society.

hear it with your ears. Alas! alas! even while recording the wonders of these latter days, the prophet foresaw your unbelief, and declared that, ere that great and notable day came in all its noon-day brilliance, this land, for the wickedness and unbelief of them that dwell therein, should be bathed in blood, amid signs and wonders and awful portents, 'blood and fire and vapour and smoke.'"

And yet how truly may we say that in the midst of judgment the Lord remembers mercy—how, in the fiercest storms, in the hottest fires, in the deepest waters, He has a city of refuge nigh, a strong tower, into which the righteous may run and be safe. So, even in these very denunciations of God's righteous wrath, the prophet and the apostle alike declare that whosoever—Jew or Gentile, bond or free—whosoever should call on the name of the Lord should be saved. It was the very promise of Jesus, in the same approaching crisis: "Great earthquakes shall be in divers places, and famines and pestilences, and fearful sights and great signs shall there be from heaven; but—there shall not an hair of your head perish."

How immediately salvation through a crucified Redeemer became the Apostle's theme! How soon was the Name once more bruited throughout Jerusalem as the only name "whereby we must be saved"!

SECTION IX.

CHAP. II. 22—37. *Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know: him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain: whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it. For David speaketh concerning him, I foresaw the Lord always before my face, for he is on my right hand, that I should not be moved; therefore did my heart rejoice, and my tongue was glad; moreover also my flesh shall rest in hope: because thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. Thou hast made known to me the ways of life; thou shalt make me full of joy with thy countenance. Men and brethren, let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulchre is with us unto this day. Therefore being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne; he seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ, that his soul was not left in hell, neither his flesh did see corruption. This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses. Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear. For David is not ascended into the heavens: but he saith himself, The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, until I make thy foes thy footstool. Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same*

Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ. Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?

It has been very truly observed of many of the discourses and sermons which have been recorded in this book that they are only brief epitomes of what was actually said by the preachers on the occasion. And this explanation certainly obviates much of the disappointment we perhaps feel in reading such apparently meagre and brief addresses; and which are yet described as having such powerful effect and influence on those that listened to them. I do not, however, think that this explanation or "apology" is needed for this address of St. Peter to the multitudes who had gathered around him and his band of brethren on the rumour of this miracle of the gift of tongues. It seems to me not simply the substance, but the sum of what he spoke, and most appropriately adapted for the purpose for which it was uttered.

Humanly speaking, there can be no doubt that Peter spoke with great advantage, if we may so call it, of time and place. He spoke of no remote event, when he spoke of the crucifixion of Jesus. It had occurred before their own eyes, in the very outskirts of their own city—the men who did the deed, the chief priests and elders who suborned the perjured witnesses, the judge who pronounced Him innocent even while he condemned, were

still living and in power—the soldiers who had arrayed Him in the scarlet robe, and plaited the crown of thorns around His head, who had stood around His cross, and guarded His tomb, still garrisoned Jerusalem—and the wondrous events of that week were still the theme in every mouth. Men's minds could not but muse on what had so recently occurred even within their own knowledge, and in which some, no doubt, of those who were then listening to Peter had mingled either as sharers or spectators.

It is true the risen Saviour had not appeared publicly in Jerusalem, but only to witnesses chosen before of God; but even "strangers in Jerusalem" must have heard and known the things that had come to pass in those days, and, no doubt, were well aware that it was affirmed and believed by vast numbers that not only had Jesus of Nazareth arisen from the dead, but, in the presence and in the sight of many, had openly ascended into heaven. And now, while musing on these things, this other miracle, this visible descent of the Holy Ghost, occurred, with its indisputable evidence of the gift of tongues; so that, as I have said, humanly speaking, Peter spoke under most favourable circumstances both of time and place.

And yet it is quite certain that all this would have been of no avail to convert a single hearer. No man ever spake like their Master, Jesus

Himself, and yet He was an unheeded preacher, and more frequently stirred up anger and opposition than won assent and approval. And so it might and would have been here, had Peter, the unlettered and despised Galilean, spoken as his own spirit gave him utterance. Even this very miracle of the gift of tongues had but drawn from the rancorous and sneering Jew the scoffing jest that the speakers were full of wine, and their words the mere babblings of drunkenness. It is true that Peter's discourse was most impressive and unflinching, its arguments most logically correct and irresistible, and its application to the hearts and consciences of those who heard him most close and powerful. And yet even this would have failed, but for that very outpouring of the Holy Ghost which accompanied Peter's words, and, like a sledge-hammer, beat down all the strongholds of Satan, and, what was perhaps stronger still, all the prejudices of the bigoted and narrow-minded Jew. If they were pricked in the heart, it was the work of the Spirit, of whom it was said that when He should come He should "convince the world of sin." If they cried out to the preacher and the rest of the apostles, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" it was because the Holy Spirit had convinced them of "a judgment to come," from which they would gladly flee. If they were now ready to cast aside their own righteousness, which was of the law, it

was because the same Spirit had made known to them a better righteousness, even "that righteousness which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe." So that we may truly say that Peter's sermon on this day of Pentecost, with all its wondrous fruits stretching far away into the boundless depths of eternity, was in itself as striking and irresistible an evidence, that could neither be denied nor gainsayed, of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit of God, as the miraculous gift of tongues.

SECTION X.

CHAP. II. 38—43. *Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call. And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation. Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls. And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers. And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles.*

IT was a significant and expressive name, by which this Feast of Pentecost was sometimes

designated and known among the Jews, when it was called "the Feast of Harvest;" and assuredly a more abundant harvest was never gathered in by spiritual husbandman than on this occasion. Is was, indeed, a solemn and appropriate inauguration of the coming of that Comforter whom Jesus had promised to send, and who was to remain with the Church on earth, even to the end. Jesus had said of the spiritual fields even of Judæa and Samaria, that they were already "white to the harvest, and ready for the sickle;" and now, no sooner had "the harvest-man begun to gather the corn, and reap the ears with his arm," than it almost realized the prediction of the prophet of a nation being born in a day, and men rejoicing before the Lord according to the joy in harvest.

You remember that when our Lord was on earth, in the early period of His ministry, Peter and some other of the disciples were engaged in their usual occupation as fishermen, and having, at their Master's bidding, let down their nets, enclosed a vast multitude of fishes; and, in reply to Peter's expressions of astonishment, and almost of alarm, at so marvellous a draught, Jesus replied, "Fear not, from henceforth thou shalt catch men." Peter assuredly must have recalled to mind on this day of Pentecost, with equal astonishment though not alarm, and with grateful adoration, this gracious declaration of his Lord,

when he saw its fulfilment in the three thousand converts that were gathered into the Gospel-net which, at his Lord's bidding, he had once more let down amid the stormy waves of that excited multitude in the city of Jerusalem.

I do not suppose that all these three thousand converts were inhabitants of Jerusalem, or even Jews. No doubt, many of those who were listening to the Apostle's preaching were of those strangers of Rome, Egypt and Libya, Arabia and elsewhere, who are mentioned in this chapter as so struck with amazement, and marvelling at hearing themselves addressed in their own respective languages by men who had never learned them, nor ever travelled beyond the confines of Judæa and Galilee. How consolatory and expressive, then, the words with which the apostle concluded his exhortation! As they heard him quote the prophecy of his own Jewish Scriptures, as they listened to its gracious promises, they might not have comprehended that it applied to them as well as to Israel; they might not understand how God had so loved a whole world as to give His Son to die for all; and there might have been some of that feeling which looked upon God only as a local God, and therefore the God of the Jews only, like those Syrian idolaters who deemed the God of Israel to be the God of the hills only and not of the valleys. It must, therefore, have sounded on their ears with especial sweet-

ness, when the Apostle added, "The promise is to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call."

Oh! how much were we interested in that precious declaration; we were then the far off, but now brought nigh by the blood of Jesus; the promise has reached our distant shores, and we are at this day the living witnesses of that truth which Peter, on the day of Pentecost, uttered in the ears of the multitude at Jerusalem, that the promise belonged unto as many as the Lord our God should call.

One can well believe, too, of these many converts, how effectual they would be, without supposing that they participated in this miraculous gift of tongues, in spreading the knowledge of that name, and that faith into which they had been baptized, in the various countries whither their occupations led them. They were, indeed, the seed of the infant Church, borne and scattered in every direction, and wherever it lighted springing up into ear and bringing forth fruit, as well as preparing the ground for that more abundant sowing, of which the Apostles were the commissioned ministers. Peter had declared of all alike that were baptized, that they should receive the gift of the Holy Ghost; but without extending that promise to the extraordinary gifts of healing and of tongues, which probably were not conferred, we see unmistakeable evidence of that

work of the Holy Spirit which issues in all good fruits, and which in this infant Church at Jerusalem so abundantly testified of the grace of God that was in them. It was no transient impression, while the preacher's words were still sounding in their ears; it was no morning cloud, nor early dew, that so soon passeth away and is gone; it was not, as the Prophet describes it, as 'the very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice,' whose words are listened to, but ere long forgotten. It is expressly recorded of these converts, those at least that remained in Jerusalem, that they continued steadfast, not only in the Apostles' doctrine, closely holding to the truth they taught in Jesus, but in fellowship also with them, casting in their lot with that despised company of the followers of the Lord Jesus, sharing alike in the reproaches and persecutions that befell them, but sharing also in all the privileges of Christian communion and Christian ordinances, in all love and charity one towards another.

SECTION XI.

CHAP. II. 44—47. *And all that believed were together, and had all things common; and sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need. And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple,*

and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the Church daily such as should be saved.

THERE are still some fragments to be gathered up from this portion of the chapter: and I think we see most unmistakeably what are the fruits of the Gospel, when faithfully and fully set forth before the people, and received with all gladness into the heart, how it issues in all good works as well as in all joy and peace in believing. Alas! how often have we to mourn over very different results in the preaching of the Word among ourselves, even though as faithfully and fully preached as then, but not so gladly received as by that band of believers who were baptized on the day of Pentecost, in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins, and who were built upon the sure foundation of God, having impressed on each this distinctive and appropriating seal, "The Lord knoweth them that are His." With too many a Christian congregation, I am afraid, the description of another Apostle more painfully applies, and however they may have been impressed at the moment by the saving truths they have heard, yet so far from continuing steadfast in that doctrine which the Apostles have handed down, they have been of that class of forgetful hearers whom St. James likens unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass, but who goeth his way, and

straightway forgetteth what manner of man he is.

With regard to one of the evidences which these converts exhibited of the change which had been wrought in them in selling their possessions, and throwing the proceeds into a common treasury for the good and welfare of all as each had need, one cannot but recognise the loving-kindness of the Lord, and the seasonable provision thus made for the wants of his infant Church in its hour of need, as provision had been before made of God for the mother of the infant Jesus by the gifts of gold, and frankincense, and myrrh. Here, however, a question may arise, "Does the Lord demand the same surrender from ourselves?" Assuredly He does *in principle*, though we are happily living in times in which He does not claim from us *the practice* of the principle to the full extent in which He required it of these early disciples.

I do not know whether times or seasons may again arise in which He will demand of His people a similar exhibition of their sincerity and love and steadfastness; but this I know and feel assured of, that if He does, however the love of many may wax cold, all the Lord's own people, through the constraining love of Christ, the love wherewith Christ hath loved them and drawn out their love to Him, will once more rise to the emergency, and be as ready and willing, not only

gladly to give of their abundance, but to carry out even to its fullest extent their Lord's principle, "Sell *all* that thou hast, and give," and even then with thankful and adoring heart to exclaim with David, "Who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able to offer so willingly after this sort? for all things come of thee, and of thine own have we given thee." It was with these converts as with David and his people; they offered willingly. It was no compulsory demand, no edict of the Apostles, no claim thrust forward by the needy themselves, no appeal from, it may be, the indigent Jew to the more wealthy Gentile; it was once more the work of that Holy Spirit, so abundantly poured out on this day of Pentecost, testifying of that love of Christ towards themselves, that, as an Apostle afterwards expressed it, as God so loved them, they ought also to love one another, and not only be ready to distribute, and willing to communicate, but even to lay down their lives for the brethren.

As I have said, God in His love does not now claim this at our hands; but *this* He does claim and expect from all His, a heart so entirely His, affections so strongly set on things above, a faith so steadfastly looking forwards to His eternal promise, that were He to say to any one of His children, "My child, give me that thine is," that child should gladly and gratefully reply, "Of thine own, Father, give I thee," and he may rest

assured, as Jacomb says, "He loses nothing that gives his all to God." * And I think the Lord oftener tries His people in this way than they perhaps imagine. He does not perhaps ask of them their wealth for His poor, or as "a loan unto the Lord," but He takes it from them. He recalls and resumes His own gift; sometimes through the fraud and baseness of others strips them bare, as we so often see in these our days, or, like His servant Job, leaves him naked as he came from his mother's womb, to try what is in his heart. And do they, like Job, answer, "The Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord!" And I think, too, that every day, while it records these and similar trials, records somewhat of that spirit which actuated these early disciples, in that no sooner is a case of this description stated, than so many are found from every quarter, some of their abundance, and some out of their deep poverty, like the poor widow with her two mites, some according to their power, and others beyond their power, all hastening to visit the fatherless and the widow in their affliction, and "to give as every man hath need."

* Jacomb on "Self-Dedication." 1668.

SECTION XII.

CHAP. III. 1—6. *Now Peter and John went up together into the temple at the hour of prayer, being the ninth hour. And a certain man lame from his mother's womb was carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, to ask alms of them that entered into the temple; who seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple asked an alms. And Peter, fastening his eyes upon him with John, said, Look on us. And he gave heed unto them, expecting to receive something of them. Then Peter said, Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk.*

THERE is something peculiarly interesting in this little incident of miraculous healing here recorded. It is hardly to be called a domestic scene, and yet few, if any, can have missed witnessing a similar one,—a crippled beggar soliciting alms by the way-side. It had once met Jesus; and what phase of human sorrow and earthly trial did not come under his sympathy and notice? You may remember how on His last journey to Jerusalem, as He passed through Jericho, a blind beggar sate by the way-side begging; and these disciples, no doubt, remembered how their loving Lord had stopped on His way to give the boon he sought.

With the shrewdness peculiar to his class, or rather, perhaps, in unison with their Oriental

habits, he had certainly chosen a very eligible spot for his appeals, no doubt thinking that those who were going themselves to beg of God would be more heedful of one that begged of them. And it was with this view, doubtless, that his friends had carried him, day after day, and laid him at the largest of the ten gates by which the temple was entered, and by which, probably, the greatest number of worshippers would enter in.

To many, no doubt, his features would be familiar, and as they saw him day by day in his forlorn and crippled state, they would probably cast him an alms as they passed in, and think no more about him; and it may be some, as they stood and prayed, thought of the poor mendicant at the Temple-gate that had been lame from his birth, and asked for a blessing on him as well as on themselves of that common Lord who was the Maker of them both.

The narrative tells us, that one afternoon, at the time of evening prayer, among the thronging worshippers were seen approaching two men, marked out by no apparent distinction—none that was distinguishable to the casual eye; and as they, too, drew nigh the beggar, he simply preferred to them, as he would to any other stranger, his request for alms. How often had he uttered the same petition—with the same tone, in the same words perhaps! He might have been carried and laid at the Beautiful Gate of the Temple for

as many weary years as the impotent man at the pool of Bethesda; at any rate, he had been afflicted for a longer period than even the thirty-and-eight years of that poor cripple. And now, to the one at the Temple-gate, as to the other in the porches of Bethesda, God sent a message of mercy, when perhaps least expected, and by hands little dreamed of. In all probability Peter and John had witnessed this miracle of their Lord's, and now again in the same city of Jerusalem were themselves called upon to testify that the absent Jesus was as mighty to save as when He walked their streets, or with His own voice spake the healing words.

There is one remark which meets us at the very threshold of Peter's address to this poor cripple, and which I cannot forbear alluding to in connexion with the circumstance recorded in the close of the last chapter, that the early converts sold their possessions and threw the proceeds into a common treasury for the good of their infant society. And yet immediately after we hear Peter, one of the leaders of that society, its most influential guide and director, incidentally declaring, "Silver and gold have I none"—a most honourable testimony, and undesigned too, save of the Holy Spirit, who recorded the fact, to the unimpeachable integrity and conscientious uprightness both of Peter and of John. Nor are Peter and John the only ones of the Lord's

people who can equally say, "Silver and gold have I none;" nor was it the first time that the Apostles had known what it was to rest alone on the Lord's promise. They had once before gone forth to preach the kingdom of heaven at their Master's bidding, and He had then sent them without purse, or scrip, or shoes, and they had lacked nothing. It was true the commission then was limited only to the towns and villages of Judea and Galilee—"to the lost sheep of the house of Israel"—their own countrymen, worshipping the same God and acknowledging the same Law, and in many an instance, no doubt, their friends and neighbours. But now their commission was to go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature, and yet at the very outset we find the same avowal—without purse and without scrip, "Silver and gold have I none." Truly the weapons of their warfare were not carnal. It is recorded of an ancient conqueror, that when he would win over the cities of Greece to his side, his ambassador was accompanied by beasts of burden laden with treasure, and that silver key not only unbarred and opened many a city gate, but closed and sealed many an opponent's mouth.

But even under the first commission Jesus said to them, as they set forth on their errand, "Freely ye have received, freely give;" and so now Peter adds, "But, though silver and gold

have I none, yet such as I have give I unto thee." How I wish that this saying of the Apostle, proverbial almost as it has become, were more in the hearts of all the Lord's people! *Every one* has something to give to him that needeth — the poorest, the feeblest, the most humanly destitute of all things—each and all have something which is precious in the Lord's eyes. Like an Apostle, they may not have silver and gold, or any such corruptible things—they may not have "a morsel of bread nor a little water in a vessel" for a prophet's wants, nor even "a cup of cold water" to give to a child in the name of Jesus,—but who has not a kind word within his reach—a word of counsel or of comfort?—who has not prayer to give?—who has not the look of kindness and of sympathy, that speaks unutterable things of love even without a word? Depend upon it, as out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh, so out of the overflowing storehouse of a Christian spirit the heart deviseth a thousand ways in which to exercise and evidence its love.

SECTION XIII.

CHAP. III. 7—11. *And he took him by the right hand, and lifted him up: and immediately his feet and ancle bones received strength. And he leaping up stood, and walked, and entered with them into the temple, walking, and leaping, and praising God. And all the people saw him walking and praising God: and they knew that it was he which sat for alms at the Beautiful gate of the temple: and they were filled with wonder and amazement at that which had happened unto him. And as the lame man which was healed held Peter and John, all the people ran together unto them in the porch which is called Solomon's, greatly wondering.*

THIS is the first recorded miracle wrought by the Apostles after the ascension of their Lord, though not the first in fact, for we were told in the preceding chapter that "many wonders and signs were done by the Apostles." Probably this was the first miracle of healing, or the first wrought in public, and it is well worth our while to examine it a little more attentively.

Peter, indeed, had declared his own poverty as to "silver and gold," and the poor cripple might have sighed at what he thought the disappointment; but was the Apostle therefore helpless, and may we not suppose that this beggar, as in obedience to their words he gazed with such eager earnestness on these two passers-by, saw somewhat in their looks that told him help was at

hand? And how far beyond silver and gold even the earthly gift of health!—how immeasurably beyond all price the knowledge of that Name by whom the blessing was conveyed.

"Rise up and walk," were the simple words which indicated the nature and extent of the gift—so Jesus Himself in His miracles simply announced the cure, "Receive thy sight," "Be thou cleansed," "Thy son liveth," "Take up thy bed and walk;" and when Jesus uttered these words virtue went out of Him to fulfil His command. He spake, and it was done; He commanded, and death and disease alike obeyed His word. "All power was given unto Him in heaven and in earth;" and as when He first sent out His disciples on their commissioned errand to preach the kingdom, He said to them, "Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils," and it was so;—so after his resurrection, ere He parted from them, and sent them forth on their more extended commission to preach the Gospel to the whole world, He again declared that the same power should be bestowed upon them. But when Peter uttered the words, "Rise up and walk," he announced also the life-giving Name by and in which the miracle was performed —"in the name of Jesus Christ." But that is not all; there is another name added—"of Nazareth." Can any good thing come out of Nazareth? Hear, O Heavens! and give ear,

O earth!—"In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk." And had that name lost its wonted power? Was Jesus Christ not the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever? Yes! as it was "in the beginning," even so was it then—as it was in their first commission, they returned again with joy, saying, "Lord! even the devils are subject unto us through thy Name;" so now, no sooner were the words spoken, no sooner the mandate issued, than immediately his feet and ancle bones received strength, and he, leaping up to show how perfect, though instantaneous, the cure, stood for the first time erect on those once-powerless joints; and not merely stood, but walked by the side of Peter and John into the very temple, with all the outward demonstrations of a joyous and a grateful heart, "walking, and leaping, and praising God."

You remember how Jesus, when He was on earth, had at Jerusalem restored sight to a poor beggar who had been blind from his birth, by bidding him go wash in the Pool of Siloam, and how, as He Himself described it, "he went, he washed, and he received sight." The people, in amazement at the miracle, and perfectly familiar with the beggar's features, exclaimed, "Is not this he that sat and begged?" but still some either honestly doubted whether it were he, or malevolently denied that it was the same indi-

vidual in order to decry the miracle and depreciate him that worked it. But here there seems to have been not one moment's doubt as to the identity of the man or the reality of the cure. How, indeed, could there be? The very man who for upwards of forty years had been a cripple, even from his mother's womb, and whose sad and destitute condition must have been known almost to every resident in Jerusalem, and certainly to every worshipper in the Temple, who had sat at its chief gate year after year to solicit alms, was this day once more seated at his usual post and in his usual occupation. Two apparent strangers are passing by, and he asks alms of them. One of them stoops over him, takes him by the hand, and bids him arise and walk; and he whom, but one instant before, the people saw crouching in his impotency at the Temple-gate, the next is beheld entering with his benefactors into the Temple itself, "walking, and leaping, and praising God." They could not, therefore, but "know that it was he which sat for alms at the Beautiful Gate of the Temple;" and as they saw him holding Peter and John by the hand, as if unwilling to relax his grasp, it could not but also be that all the spectators should be filled with wonder and amazement at that which had happened unto him. It may, indeed, very naturally have added to their surprise, and, it may be, the grateful astonishment of some, that the same

miraculous power, which Jesus had so often exercised among them, and which they perhaps thought had ceased with His death, was again revived, and as signally manifested in these His followers as in His own person. I do not suppose that any made the mistake of Herod when he heard of the works of Jesus, and imagined that John had arisen from the dead, and therefore, as he thought, these mighty works were showing forth themselves in him; but one sees at once how strikingly and appropriately it led to the very doctrine of a risen Jesus—how unerring and irresistible the inference to which Peter in his address proceeds to lead his audience.

SECTION XIV.

CHAP. III. 12—16. *And when Peter saw it, he answered unto the people, Ye men of Israel, why marvel ye at this? or why look ye so earnestly on us, as though by our own power or holiness we had made this man to walk? The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, hath glorified his Son Jesus; whom ye delivered up, and denied him in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let him go. But ye denied the Holy One and the Just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you; and killed the Prince of life, whom God hath raised from the dead; whereof we are witnesses. And his name through faith in his name hath made this man strong, whom ye see and know: yea, the*

faith which is by him hath given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all.

PETER, we find, took instant advantage of this concourse of people drawn together at the sight and report of the miracle just wrought on the poor cripple, to address to them one of the most plain-spoken and convincing, faithful yet affectionate, discourses ever left on record. It was indeed a notable miracle that had been wrought, and though Jesus Himself had done far more and far greater ones, they might, as I said before, have concluded that the power had departed with Him, and were therefore the more astonished to find men among themselves, of no outward distinction nor position in society, neither Scribe nor Pharisee, nor priest nor elder—men, if not illiterate, at least of scanty education and lowly occupation, suddenly endued with similar power to work the mighty works they had seen wrought by the hand of Jesus. Well might they marvel and look earnestly on them, as if they almost expected to see some outward sign or token to mark them from other men, as if, perhaps, a heavenly radiance would shine upon their countenances, as it did on that of their Lawgiver when he descended from such close and intimate communion with God.

The first thing which meets us in this portion of Scripture is the manifest work of grace which had been wrought in the hearts of these two dis-

ciples—not, indeed, so evident to the bystanders, but, in reality, as wonderful as that wrought on the paralysed limbs of the beggar by their side, and which led them so earnestly to disclaim and deprecate all claims to any pretensions to merit of their own, "as if by their own holiness or power they had made this man to walk." Not even do the courts of heaven resound with more emphatic disclaimer, "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us" —not even in those realms of glory did its holy inmates fall down with lowlier humility, and cast their crowns before the throne, than did these disciples reject all merit of their own.

Just for a moment consider who these were whom Peter was then addressing—not, as on the day of Pentecost, a mixed company, many of whom could have had no share in the guilt of Calvary, and perhaps had only heard of the name of Jesus as a passing rumour of the day. The audience which had now gathered around these Apostles, and were gazing so earnestly upon them, were the actual murderers of Jesus—the very men whose voices so short a time before had shouted out, "Not this man, but Barabbas"—"Crucify Him! crucify Him!"—"Let Him be crucified!" and who, in reply to Pilate's question, "Shall I crucify your King?" exclaimed, "We have no king but Cæsar."

With what holy boldness and uncompromising faithfulness does the apostle declare this their

sin! He deals in no timid generalities which men could shift off on others' shoulders; he suggests no extenuation of their guilt, that they were but the blind followers of blind leaders, and that their chief priests and elders, and their heathen judge, were in reality the slayers of the Holy One. He distinctly tells them that when that heathen judge was determined to let Him go, "*ye*," yourselves, denied Him, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you instead: nay, "*ye*," yourselves, delivered Him up to Pilate as a criminal, even Him whom your own Psalmist foretold as the Holy One, and your prophet described as the Just and having salvation. Truly, therefore, may it be said of you that ye killed the Prince of life—the very Being whom even some of your ownselves may have heard declare, as He stood at the tomb of Lazarus: "I am the resurrection and the life: he that believeth on me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die."

There was great judgment, humanly speaking, displayed by Peter in commencing his address to a Jewish audience, and thus bespeaking their favourable hearing at the very outset, by calling God "the God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers," who, in time past, had so often made Himself known to them by that endearing title of remembrance. And now,

with equal judgment and propriety, having called that Jesus whom they had crucified the Prince of life, to whom it had been given by the Father to "have life in Himself," even in the very same way and in the same sense as the eternal, self-existent Father "has life in Himself," he immediately proceeds to obviate the inference they might have drawn from his words by declaring that, though crucified, dead, and buried, yet God had raised Him from the dead, whereof they were witnesses. And, as a further confirmation of his words, he points to the healed cripple at his side, whom they had all so long known, and could therefore judge by their own eye-sight of his perfect cure and soundness, and declares that it was by the Name of Jesus, and by faith in that Name, he had been made whole.

I think we may say of Peter and of John, as our Lord said of John and his brother James, that they should be called Boanerges, or sons of thunder; for truly the Word of God in their mouths must have been not only quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, but must have pierced even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and joints and marrow, and have laid bare the very thoughts and intents of their hearts.

SECTION XV.

CHAP. III. 17—21. *And now, brethren, I wot that through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers. But those things, which God before had shewed by the mouth of all his prophets, that Christ should suffer, he hath so fulfilled. Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord; and he shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you; whom the heaven must receive until the times of the restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began.*

PETER, like a wise master-builder, had laid the foundation of his address well in seeking to convince his audience of their deep guiltiness in preferring a murderer to the Prince of life, in denying the Holy and the Just One, and giving Him over as a prey unto His enemies. The first step to a change of heart and life is to be convinced of sin: it is the first work that is predicated of the Holy Spirit, when He should come, that He should convince the world of sin. Till that is effected, till the scales fall from man's darkened eyes, and he sees and feels himself a sinner, no preacher's voice, no rebuke, no earnestness, nor affectionate remonstrance will avail: till the Lord bid the waters flow, the flinty rock will withhold its stream.

And so it was here; as in his former address on

the day of Pentecost, as the people listened, they were "pricked in their hearts, and cried out, 'Men and brethren, what shall we do?'" so now Peter, probably seeing symptoms among the multitude—and we know how such a multitude of many thousands, under the powerful excitement of the moment, and the stirring impulse of such a bold and unflinching charge as the apostle had now made, would heave to and fro, and exhibit in their every movement, as well as feature, all the emotions that were swaying in their minds;—Peter, I say, seeing, no doubt, how deeply they were moved and affected by his earnest rebukes, and that conviction of sin was already wrought in them, proceeds now, like a skilful physician, to deal gently and tenderly with them—still calling them by the affectionate and endearing appellation of brethren, and discriminating between wilful, hardened sin and the sin of ignorance. "And now, brethren, I wot that through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers"—still keeping, you see, the personal application of the charge, "*Ye did it.*" It was the same plea which his own loving Lord and Master, when hanging upon the cross, had before urged in behalf of these very murderers, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." There was, indeed, much that they did know, and the knowledge of which deeply aggravated their guilt: they knew that Jesus was innocent of every

charge laid against Him; they knew that for envy their own rulers had delivered Him up to Pilate, and that Pilate had pronounced Him innocent and without fault; they knew that one word from them would have induced Pilate to let Him go free, and that word they had withheld; and that their voices had been loudest in the cry, "Crucify Him! crucify Him!" This they could not but know, and their own consciences now told them how they, too, like Judas, had sinned in betraying the innocent blood. But still there was that they did *not* know: they knew not that Jesus was Lord of lords and King of kings; they knew not that He was God over all, blessed for evermore, from everlasting to everlasting; and they recognised not in their bound and bleeding prisoner the predicted Lamb of God, whose blood taketh away the sin of the world. They had not, therefore, committed that unpardonable sin against the Holy Ghost, which knew Him as God, and yet acknowledged Him not as God.

It was, therefore, no unmeaning call of Peter on these convicted murderers of the Lord of life to repent of this their grievous sin, and to turn unto the Lord their God, in order that* "refreshing times" might come through the blotting out of their great and aggravated sin. The words in our translation run thus: "*When* the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the

* ὅπως ἄν.

Lord Jesus Christ;" and even in this sense it conveys a precious and a blessed truth, that there can be no refreshment, no revival of spirit, no awakening of joy and peace in the Holy Ghost, till repentance has been given and conversion taken place, till they have been "turned from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of their sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in Christ." So, here, the Apostle tells us that repentance and conversion must precede these blessed results of refreshing grace and peace, which flow from the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ and His Spirit in the heart.

It is true, adds the Apostle, Jesus is no longer on earth: He has finished the work which the Father gave Him to do here. As He said on that cross whereon you hung Him, "It is finished;" man's redemption is complete, the curse is abolished, the debt paid, the ransom accepted; and He has now ascended into heaven, to remain there until that day, appointed before of God in His everlasting counsels, when He will again send that same Jesus, whom we now preach unto you, to restore and perfect and accomplish all those things which He has purposed from the foundation of the world. It may be that these days are now at hand; and Peter, I can hardly doubt, was giving utterance to that hope of his heart, so

earnest, so ever-present to every Jew, and which, almost as their last question, these disciples had addressed to Jesus, "Lord, wilt Thou at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" It was not, indeed, for them, any more than it is for us, to know the times and the seasons, which the Father hath kept in His own power; but neither prophet, nor apostle, nor preacher can err when they tell us that there can be no times of refreshing, no peace, no joy, no receiving of health from the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ, no admission nor even approach unto His kingdom, unless we repent and be converted; or, as our Lord more emphatically states it, "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

SECTION XVI.

CHAP. III. 22—26. *For Moses truly said unto the fathers, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear in all things, whatsoever he shall say unto you. And it shall come to pass, that every soul, which will not hear that prophet, shall be destroyed from among the people. Yea, and all the prophets from Samuel and those that follow after, as many as have spoken, have likewise foretold of these days. Ye are the children of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying unto Abraham, And in thy seed shall all the kindreds of*

the earth be blessed. Unto you first God, having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities.

I HAVE hinted in the preceding section that Peter probably was looking for the speedy coming of that day when "the times of restitution" or consummation of all things, of which God had spoken, should take place. No doubt the angels' words still dwelt in Peter's heart, still rung in Peter's ears, "This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven;" and Peter shared with many a brother in the earnest longing of his heart for that predicted period, when his risen and glorified Lord should again descend in the clouds of heaven to restore the kingdom, as they hoped, to Israel.

It is true, Peter, like the prophets of old, was speaking as the Spirit gave him utterance; but neither to prophet nor apostle were the times and the seasons made known; they had to pierce through the dim vista of futurity like other fallible men; where prescience was not needed, prescience was withheld; and the time of the future coming of the Lord was among those secret things that belong unto the Lord our God. Peter thought he saw its signs, as of breaking day, in that miraculous conversion of 3,000 souls on the day of Pentecost, and in the present heaving to and fro of the multitudes he

was now addressing; and though his words but obscurely intimate the hope, yet I think we may gather that he had not at this time clear insight into the will of his Lord on this matter.

Nor does this derogate in the slightest degree from the fact that Peter was an inspired Apostle, and spoke only as the Spirit gave him utterance. The Apostles were frequently left to their own undirected judgment, and no doubt frequently erred: the Holy Spirit, indeed, guided them into all necessary truth, and guarded them from all important error; but they themselves never claimed, nor was it ever claimed for them, that miraculous inspiration was at all times and in all matters to supersede and render null their own natural reason and discernment; or that every page and line of God's future providence was made a matter of special and distinct revelation. Even miraculous gifts, so abundantly vouchsafed, were frequently in abeyance, and an Apostle could neither heal himself, nor the companion of his toils. It is therefore no imputation nor depreciation of the work of an Apostle that he was at times left to the guidance of his own unassisted reason, or the expression of his own natural hopes and feelings.

It is, however, to the sure Word of God, from the first dawn of prophecy to its latest close, that Peter directs his hearers, when he would speak with authority and power. Moses was read in

their synagogues every Sabbath-day, and that prophecy of his, so long the theme of every Israelite's meditation and prayer, pointed, as they well knew, to that Prophet that should come, and to whom their earnest longings had been through every age directed. Could it be, that that Jesus, whom they had denied, whom they had crucified and slain, and to whom they had preferred a murderer,—could it be, that He was indeed that Prophet that should come, and that they had no need to look for another? How unbroken the line of prophecy from the first dim foreshadowing of mercy to a guilty world held out to Adam!—the promise to Abraham that in his seed should all the nations of the earth be blessed —the blessing confined to Jacob, while Esau, type of the scorning Jew, despised his birthright, and was rejected; and then that prediction of their own legislator, accompanied with such an awful warning of the danger of rejecting Him of whom it spake! And then again from the days of Samuel, who, though he himself left no prophecy on record, yet, no doubt, trained and taught the youthful Psalmist of Israel, who so clearly, so strikingly, and minutely had detailed the very scene on Calvary, as if his own eye had witnessed every outrage, and his own ears heard every insult!

One hardly knows which to admire most in this address of the Apostle, its bold, unhesitating

truthfulness, which held not back a single word that could convince of sin and lead to repentance, —or that overflowing tenderness which, in the midst of the severest reproaches and sternest denunciations, still recalled the gracious purpose of his Master, that to the Jew first should salvation, through His name, be offered, and whose last injunction he was now fulfilling in "beginning at Jerusalem." Moved and agitated as they were, torn by a sight and sense of sin in all its naked deformity of denying the Holy One and the Just, with what soothing tone, what softening influence, like oil upon the stormy waves, must these last words of Peter have sunk into their hearts, "Unto you, even you, the murderers and crucifiers of the Lord of life, unto you *first*, before the message of mercy should be proclaimed to any other nation under heaven, God, having raised up His Son Jesus, whereof we all are witnesses, hath sent Him—not to condemn nor destroy, not to speak words of anger, reproach, or rejection—but hath sent Him to bless you,—not, indeed, by restoring the kingdom to Israel, as you would vainly wish, not by bidding Him take His seat on the throne of his father David,—but to 'bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities.' Truly we may say, God was loving unto Israel."

SECTION XVII.

CHAP. IV. 1—3. *And as they spake unto the people, the priests, and the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees, came upon them, being grieved that they taught the people, and preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead. And they laid hands on them, and put them in hold unto the next day: for it was now even-tide.*

I WOULD just make one brief remark on what have been so justly called the "undesigned coincidences" of Scripture, simple expressions, which, without the slightest effort or design, evidence how completely the writer was narrating, not inventing, facts. I think that in this portion of our chapter we find one of those unstudied words which in an instant bring before us the whole scene, and all its correlative circumstances, with a truthfulness and exactness, to which no fiction, however careful, could attain.

One eminent writer has devoted a whole volume to the gathering together these undesigned coincidences, chiefly out of the writings of St. Paul; and I have no hesitation in saying of that work, the "Horæ Paulinæ" of Dr. Paley, that of all his writings it is by far the most valuable, and deserves a more conspicuous position in the classroom and the lecture, as well as to be more generally read and known than it is. To return, however, to our chapter.

The expression to which I allude is that in the third verse, "It was now even-tide;" and so, indeed, it was. Peter and John, you remember, had gone to the temple at the hour of evening prayer, "being the ninth hour," which answers to our three o'clock: there they found the crippled beggar seated at one of the gates soliciting alms, and, in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, had bidden him rise up and walk; and, at once restored to perfect soundness, he had entered with them into the temple, "leaping, and walking, and praising God." Meanwhile the people, marvelling and amazed at the miracle, came running together from every quarter to see what had been done, and to gaze alike on the man healed, and on those that had healed him. And it is in consequence of this gathered concourse of the people that Peter proceeded to address them in the words which are recorded in the preceding chapter. And now this chapter tells us that while Peter and John were thus addressing the people, and deepening the impression made by Peter's public harangue by more personal and private exhortations (for the expression evidently implies that both the disciples were equally engaged in speaking to the people), they were rudely interrupted in their work by a body of men armed with authority to apprehend them, and were conveyed to a place of custody till the morrow, "for," adds the historian, "it was now even-tide."

The Jewish day closed at six, and we may well believe that the proceedings, as mentioned above, had nearly occupied the whole of the three hours from the time of evening prayer to the close of the Hebrew day.

In the case of the apprehension of Jesus, He was seized at night, and immediately hurried off to the assembled council in the High Priest's house, and afterwards to their great Sanhedrim; but on that occasion, their fear of the people, as well as their blood-thirsty impatience to get their victim within their grasp, urged on this unnatural speed. But while the Master is at once dragged to judgment and to trial even at night, the less obnoxious and lowly followers are thrust into a dungeon till the morning.

The charge, however, against these disciples is, not that they had healed the cripple, that they had done an act of charity and benevolence; there was no legal, any more than there was moral guilt in that, but the charge was, that "they taught the people, preaching through Jesus the resurrection of the dead." Here, then, the question is once more brought to an issue between these Sadducees and the teachers of this new doctrine. The Sadducees, the infidels of their day, denied that there was any resurrection, scoffed at the notion, jeered at its difficulties, and invented suppositious cases to illustrate what they deemed its absurdities. Jesus, indeed, had authoritatively

denounced and refuted their tenets when He said to them, "Ye do greatly err, not knowing the Scriptures;" but Jesus was dead as they supposed, and Annas was a Sadducee, and Caiaphas a Sadducee, and Herod also; and Pilate, though he might believe in a future state, yet, as a heathen, would deny and deride the resurrection. This, then, was the point at issue—the resurrection from the dead through Jesus Christ: and let us not forget that this is with us, too, the cardinal point of our religion, for, as Paul afterwards argued, "If Christ be not raised, then is our faith vain, we are yet in our sins." Peter had preached the same doctrine on the day of Pentecost, and on that day three thousand souls gave in their adhesion to that truth as it was in Jesus.

And what is the result here? Though the Sadducees as a party were in the ascendant, though both in rank and position and influence they were the ruling power in Jerusalem; and though, to all outward appearance, two fishermen of Galilee would be more inadequately matched against them than the stripling of Bethlehem against the giant of Gath; yet even in Jerusalem, the very centre and focus of their authority and power, it would seem that their doctrines were not so deeply rooted as they might have hoped; and we shall find that even then, and in that early day, the Gospel was indeed the power of God

unto salvation to every one that believeth, to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. And we may truly add in the words of the same Apostle, that "it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe."

SECTION XVIII.

CHAP. IV. 4. *Howbeit many of them which heard the word believed; and the number of the men was about five thousand.*

TRULY we may say of this day, as of the Feast of Pentecost, that it well deserved to be called "the Feast of Harvest." It is said of the first occasion that "the same day were added to the Church about 3,000 souls." Here it is said, "Howbeit," notwithstanding the rude and violent interruption to the preacher's discourse, notwithstanding the abrupt termination to his earnest and impassioned appeals, notwithstanding they saw their chief priests and rulers hurrying off Peter and John to prison, and the consequent peril to themselves for aiding and abetting their cause—be this as it may, nay, in spite of all this, "many" of that gathered crowd which had heard the Apostle's words "believed, and the number of the men was about five thousand." Whether the historian included

the whole number of converts, or whether women and children were to be added, as in the case of our Lord's feeding the multitudes of Galilee Luke mentions only men, though the other Evangelists add, "besides women and children;" I do not pretend to say, nor is it of much importance.

I should mention, however, that most commentators consider this number of 5,000 inclusive of those three thousand gathered into the Church on the day of Pentecost; and that the historian simply meant that the whole number of Christian believers *now* amounted to five thousand. I confess I do not read it so either in our own version or in the original Greek. I confess I should be sorry, without a cause, to narrow the wondrous grace of God in thus, at the very outset of the Apostles' ministry, giving such glorious and triumphant testimony to the power by which they worked. It has been suggested, in confirmation of the first opinion, that it would be derogatory to the Holy Spirit to suppose that a larger number was converted to the faith than on that day when He was so manifestly poured forth; as if the conversion of 5,000 was not as signally and conspicuously the work of the Holy Ghost as the conversion of the 3,000. I think when our Lord spoke of Jewish and Samaritan fields as already white to the harvest, and desired His disciples to pray to the Lord of the harvest for an increase of

labourers to gather in the produce, He meant to intimate that there was an abundant harvest awaiting the reapers' sickles. It has been often a matter of reproach that the progress of the Gospel is so slow (as men count slowness); it is so frequently asked by way of taunt with regard to missionary work, "Where are your converts?" and the reply often is, "It is not the Lord's way, nor the Lord's time to give abundant increase;" and I am afraid we often adopt this answer in ignorance and from want of reflection. It is no new reproach this paucity of converts; "Have any of the rulers or the Pharisees believed on Him?" was the sneer even when Jesus was on earth; and yet both ruler and Pharisee and Herodian had already believed on Him. And I can readily believe that had these priests and Sadducees, or Annas or Caiaphas, been told that no less than 8,000 persons had been converted to the faith in Jesus in a few days, they, too, would have derided the report, and have deemed it only an "idle tale." And so at the present day I believe many and many a heathen and idolater is gathered into the fold unnoticed and unknown, like seed cast upon the waters, till the great harvest-day, when from the east and from the west, from the north and from the south, "*many* shall come in;" nay, as the beloved disciple saw it in vision, "A great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and

people, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb." And I think we greatly err in thus "limiting the Holy One of Israel;" and that because we cannot trace God's paths in the deep waters, nor behold His foot-prints in the sea, we therefore rashly conclude they are not there.

SECTION XIX.

CHAP. IV. 5—12. *And it came to pass on the morrow, that their rulers, and elders, and scribes, and Annas the high priest, and Caiaphas, and John, and Alexander, and as many as were of the kindred of the high priest, were gathered together at Jerusalem. And when they had set them in the midst, they asked, By what power, or by what name, have ye done this? Then Peter, filled with the Holy Ghost, said unto them, Ye rulers of the people, and elders of Israel, if we this day be examined of the good deed done to the impotent man, by what means he is made whole; be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him doth this man stand here before you whole. This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner. Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved.*

As one reads this bold and dauntless defence of Peter before the high priest and assembled council, one can hardly fail recalling to mind the

last occasion on which this Apostle saw Annas and Caiaphas and the other members of the Sanhedrim. It was on that memorable night, when his beloved Master was dragged as a malefactor through the streets of Jerusalem to the High Priest's hall, and the trembling disciple followed to see the end; and through the interposition of some other disciple, probably Nicodemus or Joseph, had gained admission also. It was on that night of sin, when thrice questioned by a servant girl and others whether he were one of Jesus' disciples, Peter in his terror thrice denied that he had ever known the man.

But now Peter is himself the prisoner; he, too, is dragged through the streets of the city to answer before the same council and its most powerful and influential members for the offence of preaching in the name of that risen Saviour whom he had before denied. Is denial now on his lips? Is he stammering forth a timid, trembling, coward evasion of the truth? Far from it: the coward is become the bold, uncompromising, undaunted avoucher of his principles, and, instead of quailing before their charge, at once denounces them as the crucifiers of that Jesus whom God had raised from the dead, and through whose name this impotent man now stood before them whole.

It is evident from Peter's words that the man on whom the miracle had been wrought was

present; nay, the very tenor of the accusation intimates as much, "By what name, or by what power have ye done *this?*"—making the man whole. There was no denial of the fact, no dispute as to the circumstances; it was like their own question to the man born blind, "How were thine eyes opened? What did He to thee?"

One sees at once how full Peter was of his theme; how his heart yearned even over those who had been so especially the murderers of his Lord; how he forgot, as it were, the miracle he had wrought, and the man standing before them; how he hurried on from the question they had asked to preach Jesus and His salvation unto them, quoting their own well-remembered Psalm, so significant of the rejection of Him whom they had themselves set at nought and crucified, but on whom, as the chief corner-stone, God was now about to erect His Church on the foundation of the prophets and those very Apostles who were now standing before their council for preaching Jesus Christ.

God in very wisdom, as well as mercy, has reserved in His own hands the knowledge of the future. One, perhaps, is sometimes tempted to think, that if but one glimpse, however feeble, were but just given to man to pierce through intervening ages, from how much of sin might he be spared, and how very different would be his estimate of things present and things to

come! With regard to things past, *we* stand as on a pinnacle, and can look backwards on the very point from which *they* started; we can enter that council-chamber and see Annas and Caiaphas in their pride of place, and pomp of priestly robes, and John, and Alexander, and others of the kindred of Caiaphas, with cold, and haughty, and supercilious sneers upon their lips, and, it may be, Gamaliel also, with calm and unruffled spirit, surveying the whole scene as a question in philosophy which he should like to solve, but feeling no personal interest in the solemn truth enunciated—looking, perhaps, on the Apostles with somewhat of contempt as fanatics, and yet unable to solve the mystery how that cripple was now standing before him with strengthened ancles and undistorted feet. There, too, we see Peter and John, with holy boldness, like Elijah in the presence of Ahab, or the Baptist in the court of Herod, confronting their accusers and judges, and openly declaring that the prediction of their own Psalmist had been fulfilled in Jesus, that, so far from being crushed upon the cross, or seeing corruption in the grave to which they had consigned Him, God had highly exalted Him, and given Him a name which should be above every name, and that there was no other name, however venerated or endeared, neither of Abraham, nor Isaac, nor Jacob, nor Moses, nor Psalmist, nor Prophet, Priest, nor Prince that could give salva-

tion in the remission of sins, save only the Name of the Crucified Nazarene, even Jesus Christ. It is the Name which has made this impotent man whole; but, far beyond and above that gift of healing, it is the same Almighty Name, and through faith in that Name, that can give eternal salvation to any, whether he be High Priest in the Temple, or cripple at its gate, or the lowly instruments whom the Lord vouchsafes to use. There is no other name—search it in the heights above, or in the depths beneath—there is none other whereby *we* can be saved—there is nothing but the blood of Jesus that can wash away *your* sin.

SECTION XX.

CHAP. IV. 13. *Now, when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus.*

ONE can well imagine the astonishment of this council at the bold language of these two disciples, so unusual and unprecedented in those who were summoned before them to answer for guilt or heresy laid to their charge. They might recall, too, to their remembrance the demeanour of Jesus when He was arraigned before them, with what

meek and uncomplaining submission He had borne every indignity and outrage, and how to their bitterest taunts and falsest accusations He had "answered not a word." They could, therefore, hardly account for the unexpected and uncompromising boldness of these two men, in what they might naturally and justly deem so august a presence.

To all outward appearance, and according to human judgment, both Peter and John might be deemed ignorant and unlearned men. It had been the reproach and the charge even against their Master—"how knoweth this man letters, seeing He hath never learned?"—"is not this the carpenter's son?" and the disciple was not to be in this respect above his Master. And it was this striking and unmistakeable contrast which they could not but perceive between the previous education and station of these men with the tone and tenour of their present reply, as well as their demeanour in the presence of their judge, that thus excited the astonishment of the council. They knew not, of course—and had they known they would but have derided the supposition—that Jesus had provided for this very emergency, and had distinctly bidden them, when brought before kings and rulers for His sake, not to be anxious, nor premeditate what they should say, for it should be given them in the very moment of their need. They knew nothing of, and, as

Sadducees, would have laughed the idea to scorn, of that baptism of the Holy Spirit with which they and their brethren had so shortly before been baptized. It is probable that when they sent their officer and his band of men to apprehend and bring before them these two Apostles, they knew no more of them than the current rumour that they had healed a man impotent and crippled from his birth, and were preaching strange and dangerous doctrine; and when they stood before them on that morning, they perhaps looked upon them only as fanatics, whom it would be easy to set aside. The solution, however, of the whole matter—of the fearless language, the bold appeal and undaunted carriage of these Apostles, so reversing the usual character of such as stand at the bar of man, is all contained in that simple truth which broke in upon the astonished conclave in their deliberations, "they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus."

Unhappily for these men, for Annas and Caiaphas and their kindred, they stopped on the very border of this great truth—they pursued it not to its legitimate and saving inference; and though they could not deny, they yet resisted the evidence of their own senses and the convictions of their own reason.

We are left, however, in no difficulty nor doubt; at the very commencement of Peter's address we are expressly told that he was "*filled* with the

Holy Ghost"—no scanty portion, no limited effusion, but "according to the measure of the gift of Christ," who had Himself "received of the Father the Holy Spirit without measure."

What an important lesson is conveyed to ourselves in these words, "they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus." As our Lord himself had said to them, "Ye are a city set on an hill, which cannot be hid:" and men are ever on the watch—perhaps unkindly—to detect some inconsistency in the life or language of Christian people at variance with their profession. There is, no doubt, much that is perplexing and puzzling to carnal hearts and carnal reasoning in the conduct and practice of the Lord's people—they have other rules, other principles to guide them, and the world is too apt to decry, and depreciate, and impute to wrong motives what it cannot understand. But, oh! what a noble testimony to the singleness and purity of their motives!—what a sufficient answer to all that is contradictory and ambiguous, "they have been with Jesus;" they have learned of Him, they are filled with His Spirit, conformed to His image, and are daily seeking to have more and more of the same mind which was in Him! It is that Name, as ointment poured forth, or like Mary's box of spikenard, very costly, which filled the house with its odour, which gives its own hue and its own fragrance to the whole Christian man's life and

conversation. What a simple and conclusive answer to all that causes wonder in a sneering world! Why did Moses refuse to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter?—why did he choose to suffer affliction with the people of God, rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season?—why did he esteem the reproach of Christ greater riches than all the treasures of Egypt? Because he too "had been with Jesus," and he was looking unto the recompense, that as he *had been* with Jesus, so was he *to be* with Jesus for ever, to be with Him where He is and behold His face, to see Him as He is, and be like Him.

SECTION XXI.

CHAP. IV. 14—22. *And beholding the man which was healed standing with them, they could say nothing against it. But, when they had commanded them to go aside out of the council, they conferred among themselves, saying, What shall we do to these men? for that indeed a notable miracle hath been done by them is manifest to all them that dwell in Jerusalem; and we cannot deny it. But that it spread no further among the people, let us straitly threaten them, that they speak henceforth to no man in this name. And they called them, and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the things which we*

have seen and heard. So when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding nothing how they might punish them, because of the people: for all men glorified God for that which was done. For the man was above forty years old, on whom this miracle of healing was shewed.

One cannot but see in the conduct of this council towards the followers of Jesus the restraining power of God as signal and conspicuous as when their council in earlier days had sought to take Jesus, but it is expressly added, that "no man laid hands on Him, because His hour was not yet come." So here there could be little doubt of the wish of this council, and as little of any scruples of conscience standing in their way, or any feelings of humanity or compassion towards their prisoners. If they had put Jesus to death without remorse, how much more them of his household? If they had, as they supposed, crushed the Master, would they hesitate to crush the servant also? Assuredly not; but, with all their fierce passions, they were still cowards in heart. As they would not give an answer to the question Jesus put to them concerning John, because they feared the people, and as they would not seize Jesus in the public concourse of the feast-day because they dreaded an uproar of the people, so were they now restricted from any violence towards these, the disciples of Jesus. How strikingly was that declaration of the

Psalmist verified in the scene in this council-chamber, "The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord and against His Christ;" and how abundantly realised an Apostle's triumphant declaration in after-days, "If God be for us, who can be against us?" Not Annas, nor Caiaphas, nor Herod, nor all the members of the Sanhedrim could hurt a hair of their heads, till the Lord permitted.

I do not imagine, as I have said, that the members of this council, any more than their leaders, were hampered by scruples of conscience, or that they would have hesitated a moment in crushing by any measure the further progress of this new doctrine; their very reasonings and the arguments they use for the milder course they adopted, show what was in their minds, and how gladly, had they dared, they would at once have put down the innovation. "We cannot deny it." Alas! alas! how sad to resist conviction! It was, indeed, as impotent an effort as it was in Paul to kick against the pricks, or as "a wild bull in a net," and yet what is the process of the sinner but resistance to conviction every day! The meshes of sin enclose him tighter and tighter every day, and he cannot deny it; youth and health, and fame and fortune, are all gradually slipping away, and he cannot deny it; and yet he resists conviction, and evades its power, by putting

it far from him and refusing to listen to its warning voice, just as these Sadducees think to arrest God's purposes by a charge to the Apostles to hold their tongue. They might have remembered how they had themselves heard Jesus, not so long before, say, "I tell you that if these should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out."

But while I just hint at the danger of tampering with conviction, let me recall to your notice the fearless and noble answer of these disciples, "Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye." There is a similarly noble answer of Socrates before his judges on record, "I will obey God rather than you:" * and I would say of that philosopher, in the words of Paul for another purpose, even in those days, in times past of Pagan superstition and idolatry, "God left not himself without witness," and out of the mouth of a heathen sage He ordained praise. And yet one sees at once how far beyond the declaration of Socrates was the resolution of these Apostles, to continue to preach a crucified Saviour, though it were to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness, and to proclaim to all which were called Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

How true was it, even in those earliest days of

* πείσομαι τῷ Θεῷ, μᾶλλον ἢ ὑμῖν.

the preaching of Jesus Christ and Him crucified, that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble were called; but, on the contrary, God chose the foolish things of the world to confound the wise, and the weak to confound the mighty, and things which the world despised to bring to naught the haughty Pharisee, and the sceptic Sadducee. It was most strikingly verified in this present council: with all their fierce and burning hatred against the name of Jesus, with all their eager and unabated determination to crush, if it were possible, His Gospel in the bud, they were met with bold and undaunted defiance of their power, with holy resolve to hearken unto God rather than to them, and with the unhesitating assurance that they could not but speak the things that they had seen and heard. And yet they let them go,—they dared not touch a hair of their head,—not because of God, or their reverence for Him, but "because of the people," and their fear of them.

SECTION XXII.

CHAP. IV. 23—31. *And being let go, they went to their own company, and reported all that the Chief Priests and elders had said unto them. And when they heard that, they lifted up their voice to God with one accord, and said,*

Lord, thou art God, which hast made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is: who by the mouth of thy servant David hast said, Why did the heathen rage, and the people imagine vain things? The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against his Christ. For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, for to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done. And now, Lord, behold their threatenings: and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word, by stretching forth thine hand to heal; and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of thy holy child Jesus. And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness.

It is quite evident that no personal restraint was imposed on these disciples beyond the charge not to preach any more in the name of Jesus, and that command they had repudiated in declaring their determination to hearken unto God rather than to men. But I mean that no other restriction of their perfect freedom was imposed; they might have at once withdrawn from Jerusalem and out of the reach of this Jewish Council's authority, and retired, had they so pleased, to the seclusion and security of their Galilean homes. They might have gone to their temporary abodes in Jerusalem and made preparation for their speedy departure; or they might, perhaps more naturally,

have convened a meeting of their body to discuss what measure would be best adapted to the present crisis. But we find nothing of the sort; they do, indeed, betake themselves to their fellow-disciples, and report all the proceedings of the Council, "all that the chief priests and elders had said unto them;" and what was the result? Timidity? Irresolution? Flight? Most wonderful was it, far beyond all human precedent or calculation, and totally irreconcileable with the usual dictates of human policy or prudence.

This was the first collision, so to speak, between the Jewish authorities and the disciples of Jesus Christ; to all outward appearance so unequal, as unequal as when the prophet of the Lord stood on Mount Carmel alone against the monarch of Israel, the priests of Baal, and the prophets of the groves. And yet what is the very first act of these denounced men?—the very men, remember, who in the garden of Gethsemane, at the first burst of danger, forsook Jesus and fled. It was to break forth into prayer: you may say that prayer is the natural resource of men in peril, in trial, in difficulty—and so it is, the very best defence a man can have, a tower of refuge in all time of trouble; but read this prayer, and you will find it a joyous and triumphant ascription of praise to God the Creator of all things, of heaven and earth, and sea, and all that in them is, and who had by the mouth of His servant David, so

many ages before, predicted the very outrages that had been perpetrated against His holy Child Jesus, and the actors in them, and that all that had happened had been but in accomplishment of His own eternal purpose. Oh, what a privilege and comfort in all trials and perplexities to have recourse to the Word of God, and find the whole mystery unravelled there!

Nor was this the language of a few bolder spirits to encourage the timid and wavering of their party. I know not how many there were in this company to which Peter and John betook themselves on their dismissal from the Council; it might have consisted only of the other ten Apostles; it might have embraced a large body of the disciples; or, like that meeting recorded in the first chapter, "in the upper room," there might have been present also those faithful and loving women of Magdala and Bethany, "and Mary the mother of Jesus, with his brethren." But whoever were the parties, or whatever the numbers, it is expressly declared that they all "lifted up their voice to God with one accord." No hushed and bated sound, no low and all-but whispered tones, such as men in after ages of persecution have been forced to pray in dens or caves of the earth, or by the hill-side in some secluded glen or valley, or in some upper garret, where men and women and children have met for supplication and breaking of bread with thankful but with trembling heart,

and have had their meeting rudely broken in upon by armed men, and their ministers hurried off to prison or to death. It was not so here; one loud and joyous burst of praise breaks forth from every heart to Him, to whom all power in heaven and earth belonged.

But still they end not without prayer for themselves, and their own emergencies; and that prayer is as remarkable as all the rest. It begins, "And now, Lord, behold their threatenings!" One almost seems to hear David in the 56th Psalm, "Mine enemies would daily swallow me up: they be many that fight against me. When I cry unto thee, then shall mine enemies turn back: this I know; for God is with me. I will not be afraid what man can do unto me." "Behold, Lord, their threatenings;" and what follows? that we may be released from this service of danger? That we may await a quieter and a safer period—that thou wilt deliver us out of their hand and protect us from their violence? Oh, no; but—"grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word," and still greater things be done, and still more wonders accomplished "by the name of thy holy Child Jesus!"

It is not always that so immediate an answer to prayer is vouchsafed. While Daniel, indeed, was praying, even at the very beginning of his supplication, an angel was sent with an answer of love; but far beyond angel or archangel or any

created being, the Holy Ghost Himself brought the answer of mercy. They had *all* prayed, and they were *all* filled with the Holy Ghost: they had prayed that with all boldness they might speak the word, and behold, "They spake the Word of God with all boldness." "What wilt thou that I should do unto thee?" said Jesus to a suffering one. "Lord! that I may receive my sight!" Jesus said unto him, "Receive thy sight;" and "immediately he received his sight."

SECTION XXIII.

CHAP. IV. 32—37. *And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common. And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus; and great grace was upon them all. Neither was there any among them that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, and laid them down at the apostles' feet: and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need. And Joses, who by the apostles was surnamed Barnabas, (which is, being interpreted, The son of consolation,) a Levite, and of the country of Cyprus, having land, sold it, and brought the money, and laid it at the apostles' feet.*

IT has been already mentioned in a preceding chapter how these early disciples and converts

had in many an instance introduced into their infant society a community of possessions and goods—that each contributed his individual property, or as much of it as he pleased, into a common treasury for the good of all the members. It is again referred to in the close of this chapter, with reference to the awful incident recorded in the following one; and we find from that chapter that this community of goods was no appointed, unvarying rule of man, no ordinance of God, but simply either the offering of a grateful heart, or the decision of a wise one, in surrendering the cares and burdens of property in order to devote themselves more unreservedly and exclusively to the work to which God had called them. It was evidently a regulation adapted to peculiar circumstances, and involving no obligation on Christian communities in the present day to adopt its principles or enforce its practice. The Lord, no doubt, sanctioned it in those early apostolic days, and so far, we may add, suspended His usual course with regard to human affairs, in which He has ever established it as His wise and unerring rule that there should be degrees and differences of rank and of possession. Even in this infant society of Christian converts there were the former: "first, apostles; secondarily, prophets; thirdly teachers;" and, though "all were not apostles, nor all prophets, nor all teachers, nor all workers of miracles," yet were "all ordained for

the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, and for the edifying of the body of Christ."

I know of no purpose of the Almighty so distinctly and evidently marked out in His Word as His providence, in every appointment, that there should be variety of grade, as regards both rank and wealth. "I would have you know," says the Apostle, "that the head of every man is Christ, that the head of the woman is the man, and the head of Christ is God;" that is, that God is the Head of Christ as Mediator, from whom, as such, He derives all His dignity and authority. Even in the hierarchy of heaven there is distinction between angel and archangel; and, amid those glorious orbs that stud the firmament of heaven, "one star differeth from another star in glory." It is the same in man's material frame, of which some parts are comely, and others uncomely; some feeble, and others strong; some having abundant honour, and others lacking it. It is the same, too, in mental attainment, from the idiot, with still the immortal soul, to the highest intellect of a Newton or a Galileo. And it is the same in the Lord's unvarying appointment of His human family: there ever have been, and there ever will be, "men of low degree, and men of high degree." And I think we see unerring indications that it will be so hereafter: though all enter into the joy of their Lord, yet some are

figuratively said to rule over ten cities, and some over five: so that, even in that other world, we may again say, "One star will differ from another star in glory."

I have been led into this train of thought, not because there are foolish and rash men, or, as this historian in another place describes them, "lewd men of the baser sort," who for their own selfish purposes advocate equality and communism, but because there is a Christian party* at the present day, men of sincere piety, of undoubted love, and, in the main, of holy and consistent walk, who have endeavoured to restore among themselves this community of goods and equality of rank. That they are mistaken I believe they themselves begin to find out; that their principle, as far as alms-giving is concerned, would lead to much mischief, hypocrisy, and imposition, and be productive of no good which they could not far better attain in the usual channels and current of beneficence—that their proposed equality of rank and condition is at variance with God's appointment, as well as God's Word, which enjoins every man, even to the slave, to abide in the same calling wherein he is called, and if there be a slave there must of necessity be a master also—and which equality, if carried out to-day, would hardly last

* I mean those who call themselves and are known by the name of Plymouth Brethren.

over to-morrow, are truths which I think no sound reasoner would dispute.

I would make one more remark on this chapter in general, that we must remember that all that is done and recorded in it was done under the especial and undoubted sanction and suggestion of the Holy Spirit. When Peter addressed the assembled council, we were told "he was filled with the Holy Ghost," and people took notice that he and his fellow-disciples "had been with Jesus." We are apt to think and speak of the apostles as illiterate and lowly fishermen, and men of that class. I do not say we wrong *them*, but we dishonour God. I do not know what amount of education they had received in their earlier years; but they "had been with Jesus," were taught of God, had received of His Holy Spirit, and not only had the promise that the Spirit should teach them all things, but that He should bring all things to their remembrance whatsoever Jesus had said unto them; and I think any one of these apostles might at any time have said, "Thou through Thy commandments hast made me wiser than mine enemies." And, as this miraculous knowledge and memory was intended for the emergencies and trials of the apostles' days, and has not been extended beyond, so, I believe, the mode, in which God appointed His infant Church to be sustained, was adapted to the necessities and requirements of that period, and is not binding on ourselves.

SECTION XXIV.

CHAP. V. 1—10. *But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira, his wife, sold a possession, and kept back part of the price, his wife also being privy to it, and brought a certain part, and laid it at the apostles' feet. But Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land? Whiles it remained, was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power? why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart? thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God. And Ananias hearing these words fell down, and gave up the ghost: and great fear came on all them that heard these things. And the young men arose, wound him up, and carried him out, and buried him. And it was about the space of three hours after, when his wife, not knowing what was done, came in. And Peter answered unto her, Tell me whether ye sold the land for so much? And she said, Yea, for so much. Then Peter said unto her, How is it that ye have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord? behold, the feet of them which have buried thy husband are at the door, and shall carry thee out. Then fell she down straightway at his feet, and yielded up the ghost: and the young men came in, and found her dead, and, carrying her forth, buried her by her husband.*

I DO not know if it has ever crossed any of your minds that this punishment of Ananias and Sapphira was a very severe one, and that, if every lie that is told were to be visited with equal severity, few would escape, and people would be falling down dead in every place of concourse,

whether of business or pleasure, nay, even where but two or three were met together. I fear it would be so: truthfulness is not the characteristic of mankind, inasmuch as the prince of this world is the father of lies, and his children, "as soon as they be born, go astray, and speak lies." But God, having signified by this one most awful act and righteous retribution His abhorrence of a lie, has testified to every succeeding generation that He will eventually punish all liars, and has declared throughout the whole Bible, and most significantly in its last chapter, that whosoever loveth and maketh a lie shall find no admission into the heavenly city. And, having done this, He has in a great measure reserved the punishment of liars till that final day when all liars shall have their portion in the lake which burneth with fire.

But I would not have you imagine that Ananias and Sapphira were liars of a common grade, or that the falsehood alone drew down the just vengeance of God. Their sin was of a most deep and aggravated character, and combined in it all that would render it odious and offensive in the sight of God, defrauding and dishonest to the community of which they professed to be members, and injurious and derogatory to its character and interests.

In the close of the last chapter honourable mention was made of one (of whom we often hear

afterwards) who, having land, sold it, and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet. In this chapter another disciple is recorded as doing the same thing, professing to sell all that he had, and to bring its price into the general treasury. We do not know the respective value of each property—perhaps it is not of much consequence —though I cannot help thinking that it affords some clue to the retribution that befell this guilty man and his wife. It may be that Barnabas was a rich man, and, like his Master, became poor for his brethren's sake; and it may be that Ananias was comparatively a poor man, and thought to become rich at his brethren's cost, and to secure for himself an ampler share in this commonwealth of goods by a supposed surrender of his whole possession. As Jesus had said to the Jews before, "Ye seek me, not because of the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves, and were filled." So Ananias and Sapphira might have professed to become converts, not because there was conviction in their hearts or a work of grace upon their souls, but because they saw money flowing into the treasury, and hoped to secure a share for themselves under the plea that they, too, like Barnabas and others, had surrendered all.

And even this covetous and sordid expectation was mingled with gross fraud in withholding part of the price, and claiming the credit of giving all —defrauding men and lying unto God, making

religion a cloak of covetousness; and, in their hypocrisy, seeking to pass muster with those who had given up all to God, and virtually saying in their hearts, with the wicked of old, "Is there knowledge in the Most High? The Lord shall not see, neither shall the God of Jacob regard it." So that I think we may say, as the Spirit of God said of Eli's sons, that the sin of this guilty pair was very great before the Lord, and, if undetected and unpunished, would have brought much scorn and wrong on the offering of the Lord.

I imagine that no one for a moment supposes that the Apostle was himself denouncing vengeance on this miserable man. I do not read one word of man's vengeance, or even of man's righteous sentence. The whole of Peter's address to Ananias is indeed that of stern expostulation and remonstrance, laying bare his guilt, stripping it of the flimsy covering of his hypocrisy, with which he had thought to conceal it—but there he stops —he does not, like Elisha on the similarly guilty Gehazi, denounce leprosy or death; there is not a word of threatening either of God's or of man's punishment. Peter denounces the sin, but God alone passes sentence. For aught that appears to the contrary, Peter knew not, and dreamed not of the instantaneous penalty that should follow on his words, and might himself have been as much awe-struck at the event as those around him. It was no sentence of man's judgment, nor man's

tribunal. It was the Lord that thundered out of heaven, and the Highest that gave His voice as distinctly and as awfully as when He rained down fire on the guilty cities of the plain; and may we not add with reverential awe, "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?"

It was very different in the case of Sapphira. Peter then knew the mind of the Lord, and receiving from her own lips a reiteration of her husband's falsehood and fraud, thus making herself a guilty participator in his sin, he proceeds to pass the sentence already denounced by God on the man. Does the Lord never punish sin in the very act of the offence—the unclean in his impurity—the drunkard in his intemperance—the liar in his falsehood—the rebel in his disobedience? Let the Israelitish man and Moabitish woman in their tent answer—let Elah King of Israel, "drinking himself drunk in the house of his steward," answer—let Korah, Dathan, and Abiram in their rebellion reply,—and let Ananias and Sapphira in their lie still warn us of the awful sin and peril of appealing to the God of truth in confirmation of fraud and falsehood.*

* I do not of course quote the following anecdote to corroborate the narrative in the text. The Word of God needs no such buttress, but I quote it as the best authenticated instance I know on record (out of the Bible) that the Almighty still at times vindicates his sovereignty as signally as when He struck Ananias and Sapphira dead for

their lie, or turned Lot's wife into "a pillar of salt" for her disobedience, or covered Gehazi with leprosy for his fraud and falsehood, or "dried up" Jeroboam's arm in the very instant of his violence. There are, no doubt, many instances similar to the one I am about to mention; but there is an authenticity in this which silences every cavil and satisfies every doubt. The pillar on which the record is engraven still stands in the market-place of Devizes, and though a century and more has passed, Ruth Pierce's name and guilt may still be read by every passer-by, and tell as plainly as words can tell that "lying lips are an abomination unto the Lord," and "a lying tongue but for a moment."

The following is the inscription on the pillar:—

"The Mayor and Corporation of Devizes avail themselves of the stability of this building to transmit to future times the record of an awful event which occurred in this market-place in the year 1753, hoping that such record may serve as a salutary warning against the danger of impiously invoking Divine vengeance, or of calling the holy name of God to conceal the devices of falsehood and fraud.

"*Ruth Pierce.*

"On Thursday the 25th January, 1753, Ruth Pierce, of Potterne, in this county, agreed with three other women to buy a sack of wheat in the market, each paying her due proportion towards the same. One of these two women in collecting the several quotas of money discovered a deficiency, and demanded of Ruth Pierce the sum which was wanting to make good the amount. Ruth Pierce protested she had paid her share and said, 'If she had not, she wished she might drop down dead.' She rashly repeated the awful wish, when, to the consternation and terror of the surrounding multitude, she instantly fell down and expired, having the money concealed in her hand."

SECTION XXV.

CHAP. v. 11—16. *And great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things. And by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people; (and they were all with one accord in Solomon's porch. And of the rest durst no man join himself to them: but the people magnified them. And believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women.) Insomuch that they brought forth the sick into the streets, and laid them on beds and couches, that at the least the shadow of Peter passing by might overshadow some of them. There came also a multitude out of the cities round about unto Jerusalem, bringing sick folks, and them which were vexed with unclean spirits: and they were healed every one.*

ONE merciful and valuable result of the awful event recorded in the first part of this chapter—the death of Ananias and Sapphira—was that it at once supplied a most convincing test of the sincerity of those who joined the infant Church, and raised up an impassable barrier against all who from selfish and covetous motives might have been led to profess communion with it. A society which professed to have all things in common, and in which the richer members voluntarily surrendered all their possessions for the benefit of the whole, might very naturally attract the more needy and induce them to profess a faith to which worldly self-interest would be the

prevailing motive. But God had so signally laid bare the heart of one hypocrite, and so awfully evidenced His displeasure, and had also so manifestly invested the Apostles with power from on high as ministers of His justice, that not one, unless in reality a sincere convert, unless drawn by the power of the Holy Spirit, was likely to profess himself a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ. Humanly speaking, no religion held out so little to attract, so much to repel; and when one reads of such numbers as 3,000 in one day and 5,000 on another becoming members of the Church of Christ, one can only exclaim, "This is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes."

And yet we may say, "In the midst of judgment the Lord remembered mercy," and while one act of righteous severity deterred the hypocrite and unbeliever, so many miracles of mercy and healing love were multiplied on every side, and such evidences of Almighty power working with them were given to the Apostles, that multitudes of believers both of men and women were added to the Church.

I think one detects somewhat of superstitious feeling working in the minds probably of the sick themselves, as well as of those that brought them, insomuch that some even carried their suffering friends and laid their couches in the streets, in the hope that the mere shadow of Peter, as he passed

by, might overshadow some of them for their recovery. It is possible that the Lord might honour His own work by vouchsafing healing to these afflicted ones, and might forgive the infirmity of the act in the faith of the motive. It is said in the ensuing verse, "and they were healed every one," and this expression may include those that thus waited even for the shadow of an Apostle: as a poor one had once before said of Jesus, "If I may but touch the hem of his garment, I shall be whole;" and He who read her heart compassionated the weakness, even while He avouched the strength of her faith. No doubt Peter's voice, or Peter's touch, or Peter's shadow were alike unavailing unless the Lord gave the word; and if power from on high were vouchsafed, I see no reason why we should ascribe to one instrument greater efficacy than to another.

But the greatest miracle of all was that priests and Sadducees held their peace. The last time we read of Annas and Caiaphas, they had sat in judgment on the proceedings of these very Apostles: one poor cripple had been healed, and all Jerusalem had been stirred to its depths, and an immediate council summoned to take measures to silence the disciples of Jesus; and they had accordingly commanded them "not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus." And yet, in the very teeth of this prohibition, in the very midst of those that hated them and

sought opportunity against them, in the open day, and in the public streets of Jerusalem, nay, in the most open and crowded resort of the Temple, where Gentiles as well as Jews could be admitted, and which was known by the name of Solomon's Porch, or Cloister, without let or hindrance did these Apostles go forth in their Master's name, "heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, cast out devils," and, as was said of Paul afterwards, "preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ with all confidence, no man forbidding them."

Whence was this? It was not indifference, it was not contempt on the part of priest or Sadducee. It was the Lord's doing; and most marvellous was it. "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit," saith the Lord of Hosts. "Strong in the Lord and in the power of His might," they might have taken up the language of their own Psalmist, and said that it was "God's right hand and his arm, and the light of his countenance, because He had a favour unto them."

SECTION XXVI.

CHAP. V. 17—25. *Then the High Priest rose up, and all they that were with him, (which is the sect of the Sadducees,) and were filled with indignation, and laid their*

hands on the apostles, and put them in the common prison. But the angel of the Lord by night opened the prison doors, and brought them forth, and said, Go, stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life. And when they heard that, they entered into the temple early in the morning, and taught. But the High Priest came, and they that were with him, and called the council together, and all the senate of the children of Israel, and sent to the prison to have them brought. But when the officers came, and found them not in the prison, they returned, and told, saying, The prison truly found we shut with all safety, and the keepers standing without before the doors: but when we had opened, we found no man within. Now when the High Priest and the captain of the temple and the Chief Priests heard these things, they doubted of them whereunto this would grow. Then came one and told them, saying, Behold, the men whom ye put in prison are standing in the temple, and teaching the people.

I DO not know what time elapsed between the first and the second imprisonment of the Apostles; probably not very long, a few days or a few weeks it may be. In the interval, however, we find that much excitement and expectation had been stirred up, both in Jerusalem and the cities round about, by the many signs and wonders wrought among the people by the hands of the Apostles, and the preaching of the name of Jesus. I remarked, too, on that wonderful providence and care of God over these His servants, that during the whole of that period, be it long or short, the hands of their enemies were so signally restrained that not a single finger was lifted up against them. One

can well believe, however, how in the midst of this apparent quiet and indifference, their indignation was ready to break forth, how every announcement of fresh miracles and fresh multitudes flocking in from every quarter must have added gall and bitterness to their position, so that at last they determined to make another and a bolder effort to crush its progress—an effort permitted of God for the more signal manifestation of that power, which alike declares to the waves of the sea or the madness of the people, "Hitherto shalt thou come but no further, and there shall thy proud waves be stopped."

In the former effort two only of the Apostles, Peter and John, were seized;—here I think it is evidently implied that the whole twelve were simultaneously apprehended, and, for greater security, lodged in the common prison of the city. But what are bars and bolts to Him, who has the keys even of hell and the grave, and will one day open every prison of every grave in which His people are laid, and bid the prisoners go free? Here we find the agency employed was an angel of the Lord. How those ministers of His must have delighted to do His will! How truly were they ministering spirits sent forth to minister to the heirs of salvation. It was, indeed, an errand of love and mercy on which this angelic being was sent; not so much to the individuals who were

released from the prison, as to the whole city and people of Jerusalem.

Had this act of omnipotence been read aright, both Annas and Caiaphas and all their kindred might have had reason to rejoice throughout eternity; and we, too, who at this distant day are reading the narrative may rejoice in this added testimony which God the Holy Ghost has given to the existence and agency of these ministering spirits. And if in the first portion of this chapter we had sad and unerring evidence of the existence and agency of an evil and a fallen spirit, if we saw unmistakeable proof of the reality of his work in his filling human hearts with fraud and falsehood to their eternal ruin; if that passage left undoubted testimony that there was a being going about like a roaring lion, and seeking whom he might devour, so this same chapter furnishes sweet and convincing assurance that there are angels, greater in power and might, still commissioned to encamp round about them that fear the Lord, and to keep them in all their ways.

The Sadducees, indeed, denied both; could they have seen that "common prison" in the darkness of that night, and, it may be, heard the praises and the prayers of those shut up within its walls; could they have witnessed that angel of the Lord opening the prison-doors, as once before an angel of the Lord opened the doors of the

grave of Jesus, while the keepers without became as dead men; and could they have heard the solemn mission and purpose in which their recovered liberty was to be employed: "Go, stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life," of Him who has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel; could they have heard and witnessed this, it might have been said of them, as of one brought up at the feet of one of their body, that they which persecuted in times past, now preach the faith which once they sought to destroy. But no! they had Moses and the prophets, and if they heard not them, neither would they have been persuaded, though an angel from heaven had spoken to them, and brought them a message from Jesus.

It is a striking coincidence that as these Sadducees denied both Angel and Spirit, so they denied also the resurrection of the dead; and it must have been a powerful confirmation and assurance to these Apostles, that God had once more sent His angel, whose existence these Sadducees denied, and by the ministration of an angel had bidden them go and stand in the temple and preach to the people that life, and the resurrection to that life, which their judges equally denied.

One can, perhaps, picture to oneself the solemn pomp and gravity with which this council would assemble on the morrow; how Caiaphas and his

father-in-law, and John and Alexander, and Gamaliel and others of like degree, would take their judicial seats, and order the prisoners to be brought before them; and one can perhaps more accurately imagine the surprise and almost consternation, which would be marked in every countenance, when the successive messengers announced the astounding intelligence that their prisoners were no longer to be found, that bars and bolts and guards were, indeed, undisturbed, and still keeping untiring watch, but over untenanted dungeons. "The prison truly found we shut with all safety, and the keepers standing without bofore the doors; but when we had opened, we found no man within." And whither had they fled? Whither had they betaken themselves out of the reach of justice? Whither in their terror had they hid themselves? Lo! another messenger arrives, and tells them that the men, whose prison-doors had so noiselessly opened to give them free passage out, were at that very moment standing in the temple, and once more boldly preaching in the forbidden Name of Jesus, and teaching the people. Well might even a sceptic, sneering Sadducee "wonder whereunto this should grow!" *They* could not indeed explain the marvel, but, blessed be God, we have seen its growth, and are ourselves rejoicing under the shadow of that tree of life which yields her fruit every month, and whose leaves are for the healing of the nations.

SECTION XXVII.

CHAP. V. 26—32. *Then went the captain with the officers, and brought them without violence: for they feared the people, lest they should have been stoned. And when they had brought them, they set them before the council: and the High Priest asked them, saying, Did not we straitly command you that ye should not teach in this name; and, behold, ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this man's blood upon us. Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men. The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree. Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins. And we are his witnesses of these things; and so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey him.*

THERE was a striking difference in the feelings of the people at Jerusalem from that day, when Jesus proclaimed to them the great truth of His everlasting GODHEAD in those memorable words, "Before Abraham was, I AM; and they took up stones to cast at Him." There must have been a wonderful change in the minds even of all from that still sadder day when they so ferociously clamoured for his life and imprecated on themselves and their posterity that awful curse—"His blood be on us, and on our children." *Now*, the despised followers of that despised Master are themselves held in such repute by the people that

the very officers of justice sent to apprehend them dared not evince nor exercise the least severity or even roughness against them lest they should exasperate the people against themselves, and so suffer the fate that had been attempted against the life of Jesus in being stoned of the people.

Nor was this all. Many, we can hardly doubt, of this very council had joined in the cry of "Crucify him, crucify him," "His blood be on us:" then they were bold and loud enough, and no doubt deemed that "blood of the covenant, wherewith He was sanctified, a common and unholy thing." Yet here, how is their tone changed, and they charge it as a crime on these Apostles, not that they had broken loose from prison and set at nought their authority—not that they had transgressed their command, and were found doing that which they had commanded them not to do,—but that they were endeavouring to bring this man's blood upon their heads. What an unwilling, or at least unconscious testimony to the truth and innocence of Jesus is extorted even from the lips of those that hated Him! Had the blood of Jesus indeed righteously flowed, had it been poured out in strict accordance with their law,—had their own law of Moses or that of their heathen rulers pronounced him guilty, or had even Herod declared him worthy of death, the shedding of that blood would have

entailed no guilt nor the recollection of it awakened any fears. The judge is not conscience-smitten when he reflects on the guilty criminal whom He has doomed to die—he is not scared in the visions of the night by the sight of him whom he has pronounced guilty; nor, if memory recalls the scene, is it to darken his pathway with the dread of vengeance against an unrighteous decree.

What a striking testimony, too, does this council unwittingly give not only to the boldness but to the success of the preaching of these Apostles, "Ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine!" It was their Lord's own injunction, "What I tell you in darkness, that speak ye in light; what ye hear in the ear, that preach ye upon the house-tops, and fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul;" or, as the Lord issued His command to His prophet, "Proclaim all these words in the cities of Judah, and in the streets of Jerusalem;" and how emphatically significant the confirmation of the progress of the Gospel in these almost incidental allusions, "The same day were added unto them three thousand souls"—"The Lord added to the Church daily such as should be saved"—"the number of the men was about five thousand"—"believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women." There was no exaggeration in their expression,

fear had not magnified their alarm,—"Ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine."

Peter seems to have been the general spokesman of the rest of the Apostles on this as on preceding occasions: probably his age pointed him out for the lead, and one can only admire the spirit of Christian brotherhood and love which must have animated this band of holy Apostles in at once selecting without a particle of jealousy or unkind recrimination or allusion this Apostle as their temporary leader. Not more entire and complete the restoration to the forgiving love of his Lord, than to the generous and unhesitating reception of all his brethren. We may truly say of them in the words of their historian, "they were of one heart and one soul."

Peter's reply on this occasion commences in the same bold and uncompromising spirit as on the preceding one, "We ought to obey God rather than men." It was as one of these Apostles afterwards wrote, "No new commandment, but an old commandment,* which men had had from

* I have already alluded to the words of Socrates, "*πέισομαι δέ θεῷ, μᾶλλον ἢ ὑμῖν.*" I might also quote the remark of the historian on the obedience of the Lacedæmonians to a command of an oracle, even though it involved a violation of the sacred ties of hospitality: "*τὰ τοῦ θεοῦ πρεσβύτερα ἐποιεῦντο, ἢ τὰ τῶν ανδρῶν;*" but the noblest avowal of the principle in heathen literature is to be found in Antigone's defence of herself before Creon in the play of that name—l. 460.

the beginning." But what a condensation of Gospel truth in all its fulness is contained in this brief address of Peter's;—a crucified Redeemer, raised up of God from the dead, exalted unto God's own right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, and that, in order to give repentance to Israel and remission of sins, of which the Holy Ghost was a witness with themselves. So that God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost were alike declared before this council to be agents in the stupendous work of man's redemption; and the whole closed with that offer of grace and mercy,—the assurance of the gift of the Holy Spirit to them that obey God,—Redemption by Jesus Christ—Regeneration by the Holy Ghost —and that the gift of God.

SECTION XXVIII.

CHAP. V. 33—39. *When they heard that, they were cut to the heart, and took counsel to slay them. Then stood there up one in the council, a Pharisee, named Gamaliel, a doctor of the law, had in reputation among all the people, and commanded to put the apostles forth a little space: and said unto them, Ye men of Israel, take heed to yourselves what ye intend to do as touching these men. For before these days rose up Theudas, boasting himself to be somebody; to whom a number of men, about four hundred, joined themselves: who was slain; and all, as many as obeyed him, were scattered, and brought to nought. After*

this man rose up Judas of Galilee in the days of the taxing, and drew away much people after him: he also perished; and all, even as many as obeyed him, were dispersed. And now I say unto you, Refrain from these men, and let them alone: for if this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nought; but if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it: lest haply ye be found even to fight against God.

ONE can hardly wonder at the violence of the rage which seized upon the members of this Sadducean council at the bold, unflinching address of Peter and his brethren. Our version scarcely gives an adequate idea of the fury which "sawed" them, as it were, in pieces, so that they could in no measure restrain the most unseemly passion that would have hurried them to summary and instant vengeance. But, as on an after occasion, God overruled the admixture of Sadducees and Pharisees to the preservation of his Apostle Paul, so, in the present instance, Gamaliel a Pharisee is the instrument in the Lord's hands to restrain this madness of the rulers.

There is much difference of opinion as to the character of Gamaliel: some have even claimed him as almost and altogether a Christian, of which we find not a single vestige, but everything to the contrary. He might undoubtedly have said of himself, as his scholar afterwards said of himself, that those who knew him from the beginning would testify that after the straitest sect of his

religion he lived a Pharisee; and that he died in all the bitterness and bigotry of Pharisaic Judaism I think we are justified in concluding from a prayer of his which has come down to our times, "Let there be no hope to them who apostatize from the true religion, and let heretics, how many soever they be, all perish as in a moment."* That he was held in highest repute and estimation among those of his own nation, there can be no doubt—that his school was looked upon as the most valuable to which a young student could be admitted, is equally true; and, if we may judge of the character of the teacher from the after career of a pupil, quoting his master's instructions and acknowledging him as his guide and pattern, we need have little scruple in ascribing to Gamaliel's tuition, in a great degree, the bitter fruits of Paul's practice in his earlier years.

It is, however, with the counsel which he here gives to his colleagues that we now have to do, and I think it affords much insight into his character. This Sanhedrim, you must remember, was at this time decidedly Sadducean in the majority of its members, and Gamaliel was a Pharisee, and therefore altogether opposed to the views and principles and doctrines of most of his colleagues. And yet it is remarkable that both Caiaphas and Gamaliel, under nearly similar circumstances, alike reasoned

* Conybeare and Howson, quoting from Hartwell Horne.

on the low and miserable footing of expediency. We have the arguments of Caiaphas for the putting of Jesus to death—"It is expedient that He should die, and that the whole nation perish not;" and so the whole gist of Gamaliel's argument is the expediency of letting the apostles go. He does, indeed, add, "lest haply ye be found to fight against God," but I think we may fairly suppose that he was far more inclined to class Jesus and His followers in the same category with Theudas and Judas of Galilee, who had, as he expresses it, "boasted themselves to be somebody," and yet had miserably perished, and their purposes come to nought.

The name and the doctrine of Jesus of Nazareth, His many miracles, His life and walk of love, His death at Jerusalem, His avowed resurrection, the descent of the Holy Ghost, the undaunted zeal and preaching of his apostles, and the wonders wrought by their hands, and the multitudes converted to the faith, could in no sense have been unknown to him; and yet himself, at this time almost an aged man, not simply indifferent to and disregarding all, but training up the scholars that sate at his feet and listened to his instructions, in the bitterest hatred and contempt of the name of Jesus, so that, as one acknowledged of himself, "he verily thought within himself that he ought to do many things contrary to the name

of Jesus of Nazareth." And even here one can hardly fail to see with what supercilious sneer, scarcely veiled under the semblance of decorous waiting for the manifestation of God's will, he talks of Jesus and Judas and Theudas as on the same footing in his rationalistic estimation—in the same spirit as a self-styled philosopher of the present day* has said, "The trances of Socrates, the vision of Porphyry, the conversion of St. Paul, the convulsions of George Fox, and the illumination of Swedenborg, all have a certain tendency to insanity."

What further manifestation of God's will could Gamaliel desire than had been already vouchsafed, had he approached it in the humble spirit of one who desired to know the truth? He had Moses and the prophets, he had the evidence of his own senses, and he could not but know the pitiful sophistry of testing truth by its success over error. He had but to cast his eyes over the broad expanse of heathendom, stretching far and wide through every civilized land, and then to turn homewards to the narrow limits of his own scanty Palestine, and acknowledge that his test rested on no tenable basis. I do not deny the worldly expediency and discretion of this counsel of Gamaliel; but I think we may say of it, as was said of that of Caiaphas, "This spake he not of himself," and that the Lord overruled the deliberations of this council "to do

* Emerson.

whatsoever His hand and His counsel determined before to be done."

SECTION XXIX.

CHAP. V. 40—42. *And to him they agreed: and when they had called the apostles, and beaten them, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name. And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ.*

To our ideas of justice and humanity it seems revolting that this council should decide on acquitting their prisoners, and yet subject them to scourging before they dismissed them. They were either guilty or innocent: in the one case, the sentence of the law should have been carried out; in the other, no punishment at all should have been inflicted. We should probably have reasoned in this way, and have reasoned correctly, but such was evidently not the reasoning nor the practice of courts of justice in those days. 'The disciple is not above his master,' said our Lord, and,—as Pilate had said of Jesus "I find no fault at all with this man,—I will therefore chastise Him, and let Him go," so this council, though they had agreed to the opinion of Gamaliel to let

them go, still inflicted the shame and punishment of scourging; nor does Gamaliel appear to have uttered a word against their purpose. But, though this act was not inconsistent with their usual practice, I think it shows how little in reality Gamaliel could have thought of or cared for God's honour in not protesting against the lesser as he had against the greater punishment, and that on exactly the same grounds. His plea for their acquittal was that they might be God's messengers, commissioned by the Almighty—His heralds, sent on His errand—and yet—"beat them, and charge them to speak no more in the name of Jesus." Strange inconsistency for so wise a man! His eyes were indeed blinded, and his heart hardened, that he could neither see with his eyes, nor understand with his heart. "Not many wise men after the flesh are called," said his pupil afterwards—he might have illustrated his remark by the example of his own teacher; and he might have added of himself, in the words of the Psalmist, "I have more understanding than my teachers; for Thy testimonies have been my meditation."

We hear no more of Gamaliel than what is mentioned in this chapter. Here begins and here ends the Bible's record of him. We know, indeed, that he never became a convert to the Christian faith, and that he died about eighteen years before the destruction of Jerusalem, and was

buried with unusual pomp.* What his feelings may have been at the change in his favourite pupil, the pride and boast of his school—whether they ever met afterwards, or whether their first and only meeting will be on that day when both teacher and learner shall alike stand before the judgment-seat of God—whether Gamaliel mourned over his alienation as one that sorroweth for an erring child, or whether it exasperated him into greater bitterness and more unrelenting hatred against the Christian faith, and gave rise to that prayer in which he prayed for the instant extermination of all apostates from the Jewish faith, we know not: all that we know is that Gamaliel lived and died an unbeliever.

Let us now for a moment accompany these respective parties home on their withdrawal from the Council. Of the one, indeed, we have no account; it may be that the High Priest went to the Temple service at noon-day, and there officiated, as if no blood, no cruelty, rested on his conscience; it may be that some Pharisee of the Council went up also into the temple to pray, and there thanked God for his own superior righteousness, that he was different from other men, and especially from those poor deluded fanatics to whose scourging he had just been a consenting party. One can picture to oneself Gamaliel, too, returning to his school, and there seated on the

* Conybeare and Howson's "Life of St. Paul."

ground in the centre of his scholars recounting all that had been done, and how, after they had been beaten, these followers of Jesus had been strictly charged neither to preach nor teach any more in the name of the hated Nazarene. And amid that band of scholars we can perhaps see one, the young man Saul, at the very feet of Gamaliel, with upturned, glistening eyes looking intently on his master's face, and drinking in with eager joy every word that fell from his lips.

But whatever might be employments and occupations of the one party, we are at no loss to know whither the others betook themselves, nor what their feelings were on this first taste of man's persecution and outrage. They, too, departed from the Council, and it is expressly added that they went on their way "rejoicing;" but rejoicing for what? that they had escaped with their lives, though at the expense of personal suffering and pain? that no greater burden had been laid on them than that they should cease to teach in the name of Jesus? All these would have been legitimate subjects of rejoicing to ordinary men under ordinary circumstances; but, as one, now an alien and persecutor but hereafter a preacher of the same faith, declared of himself, "Their rejoicing was this, the testimony of their conscience that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, they had their conversation in the world," aye, and that

too "more abundantly" in spite of opposition, persecution, and outrage. "They rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name." "Counted worthy to suffer shame!" "What shall be done unto the man whom the king delighteth to honour?" was once asked; and royal apparel, and the king's horse, and the king's crown, were selected for him whom man counted worthy. But 'what shall be done to the man whom God counteth worthy?' Shame and suffering for His name—to be made as the filth of the world, and the offscouring of all things. Well might Jesus have said to them, "Not as the world giveth, give I unto you;" and how fully realized His own promise, "Blessed are ye, when men shall hate you and cast out your name as evil for the Son of man's sake; rejoice ye in that day, and leap for joy."

And what a wonderful testimony does every word of the last verse give to the fidelity, the courage, and the faith of these men of God! We could not leave out one word without marring the completeness of the picture. "Daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ." Oh, 'glorious company of the Apostles!' Oh, 'noble army of martyrs!' "being reviled, you bless; being persecuted, you suffer it; being defamed, you entreat." "In all these things more than conquerors through Him that loved you."

SECTION XXX.

CHAP. VI. 1—4. *And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration. Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables. Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business. But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word.*

IT is sad to think how soon the union and kind feeling of this little Christian community was marred and interrupted by jealousies and disputes. "It must needs be that offences will come," and next to the wrong of him that causes the offence is his, who, when he has it in his power to allay dissension by a word in season or by a judicious exercise of authority, yet leaves it to be exasperated into still greater bitterness by neglect or indifference. A little while ago, and we read of this Christian family that they were all of one mind and heart, joining in public and social prayer, and all the offices of mutual charity and good will. Here, however, we find it otherwise, and the first symptom of a different spirit beginning to prevail is with regard to the distribution of the common fund, as if one had

more than another, one too much, and another too little.

I think we see in this early outbreak of jealousy and selfishness a sufficient indication of the incompatibility of a community of goods with the natural cravings of man, and how soon the corrupt heart would find or suspect partiality or wrong. Whether there were any grounds for the complaints alleged in the present instance, we know not; probably there was some foundation for dissatisfaction, and dissatisfaction soon leads to murmuring. The very names of the contending parties seem to indicate a deeper root of bitterness than a mere transient oversight or preference, —Hebrews and Hellenists, or Grecians, that is, native and foreign Jews; the one Hebrews of the Hebrews, the others, though Jews, yet living and educated in Grecian cities, speaking the Greek language, and having their own Greek Septuagint version of the Scriptures, though still keeping up and holding intercourse with the mother-country, especially at its stated annual festivals.

It is very possible that amid such discordant elements jealousies might creep in, and unconscious partiality favour one more than another. It is very difficult in the daily distribution of public funds, or in the exercise of private charity, or, indeed, in the common intercourse of man with man to avoid something like a bias that leans to one side more than another. Even in Joseph's

banquet to his brethren Benjamin's share was far larger than those of his other brothers, and though we do not read of any outward murmuring on that occasion, I can readily imagine the other ten looking askant on Benjamin's larger portion, and wondering why he, the youngest too, should be so preferred and favoured. Be this, however, as it may, charity and the distribution of public money should not only be free from all abuse, but from all suspicion; and I think the words here imply, if not abuse, at least neglect, or perhaps we might say, overlooking of some of the Hellenistic widows in the daily ministration of their common funds. You will see that the murmuring arose, not because there was a suspicion that their widows were neglected, but "*because they were neglected.*"

The Apostles themselves personally, it would seem, had nothing to do with this daily ministration, but the duty had apparently devolved on others, perhaps some of their own immediate kindred and friends. The dissatisfaction, however, as to its distribution, was soon reported to them, and they instantly took steps, most judicious and sound, to check its further progress. It is probable that the Apostles were requested to take this duty on themselves, or at least superintend and control its execution; but immediately convening the general body of the disciples, they at once declined the suggestion, and pointed

out its unreasonableness and inappropriateness with their other more important work. "It is not meet that we should leave the Word of God and serve tables." It is a very striking sentence, and one that requires to be deeply pondered for its meaning. Humanly speaking, one would say that acts of charity and distribution of alms, of food and clothing, were among the deeds most meet for a minister of Christ: and so they are in subordination to, and in furtherance of, their still greater and meeter work. Whatever interferes with the paramount ministerial work, however laudable or innocent in itself; whatever trenches too largely on time, on bodily strength, or mental energies, so as to absorb in undue proportion in secular work what should be given to more important duties, is unseemly and inappropriate in a minister of the Gospel.

Moses attempted the task, and was obliged to acknowledge, "I am not able to bear all this people alone, because it is too heavy for me." And our blessed Lord is very stringent on this point, and intimates that not even the natural ties of life must be allowed preponderance over the far higher duty of the Lord's work; "Suffer me first to go and bury my father," was the not unnatural request of one; "Let the dead bury their dead, but go thou and preach the kingdom of God," was the answer of Jesus. And when [redacted]*as* busied even in her anxious desire to do

honour to Jesus as a guest under her roof, He rebuked the unneeded 'cumber' of her service, and approved the more earnest spirit of her that sate at His feet and listened to His word. I am not speaking now of those who think to compromise for the neglect of ministerial and pastoral duty by more abundant almsgiving and attention to the temporal wants of those committed to their charge, who are kind indeed to their bodies, but at the expense of their souls. Our Lord's rebuke might justly be applied to such: "This ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone."

"We will give ourselves continually to the ministry;" but the Apostles add another duty also, "and to prayer." 'The prayerless soul is the fruitless soul;' and when one takes in all a minister's work, as St. Paul sums it up, "preaching the Word, being instant in season and out of season, reproving, rebuking, exhorting with all long-suffering and doctrine," and add to this, that daily and hourly and almost momently anointing of prayer, without which the wheels and machinery of the soul's work will soon get out of order, and become clogged up with dust and rust—I think a minister who is duly impressed with, and acts upon, a sense of his responsibility, will find but little time for 'serving tables,' or so entangling himself with the cares and pursuits of secular employments, even though innocent in

themselves, as to interfere with those higher claims to which he has devoted himself.

SECTION XXXI.

CHAP. VI. 5—15. *And the saying pleased the whole multitude: and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolas a proselyte of Antioch: whom they set before the apostles: and when they had prayed, they laid their hands on them. And the word of God increased; and the number of disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith. And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people. Then there arose certain of the synagogue, which is called the synagogue of the Libertines, and Cyrenians, and Alexandrians, and of them of Cilicia and of Asia, disputing with Stephen. And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake. Then they suborned men, which said, We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses, and against God. And they stirred up the people, and the elders, and the Scribes, and came upon him, and caught him, and brought him to the council, and set up false witnesses, which said, This man ceaseth not to speak blasphemous words against this holy place, and the law: for we have heard him say, that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered us. And all that sat in the council, looking stedfastly on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel.*

I THINK we find in the names of these selected

deacons a tacit avowal that there were some grounds for complaint of the distribution of the funds of this Christian community: for every name is a Grecian name, and they were Grecian widows who were neglected, so that they were at once consigned to the care of those who would most naturally care for them. And I think we may mark also the perfect good sense, kind feeling, and impartial judgment that was exercised in the selection; and though it was possible that the Hebrews might in their turn have murmured against the partiality of the choice, yet the sanction and approval of the Apostles, and their giving them their commission by the solemn imposition of hands, preceded as it was by prayer, seems at once to have stamped the whole proceeding with higher sanction than that of man.

I need not here enter on the question of the different orders and degrees in the Church's economy: we have retained the name of "deacon," but probably not the office assigned to these men. Of the seven who are here named, two, Stephen and Philip, are more prominently brought forward than the rest, whose names we never meet again in the sacred volume: Stephen, the first who sealed his faith in his blood, and whose career of usefulness was, humanly speaking, prematurely closed, but whose dying prayer was so speedily heard and answered in the conversion of that

young man, Saul, the instigator and abettor of his bloody death; and the other, Philip, the honoured instrument of God in the conversion of the treasurer of the Æthiopian queen. The only other name to which I would allude is Nicolas, who is called a proselyte of Antioch, the first time that important and flourishing Syrian city is named, but which henceforth we shall find in these Apostolic annals holding "divided empire" with Jerusalem itself.

With such energy and vitality, such zeal and Christian love, and such abundant evidence of the grace and power of God working with them by signs following, we need not wonder that "multitudes were still continually added to the Church," and that even of the priesthood a great number joined their ranks. It is a natural question, however, which meets us here, as to what Annas and Caiaphas and the Sadducean party were doing at this time, so as to leave the Apostles undisturbed in their proceedings. Probably the same divisions among themselves, of the Pharisee and the Sadducee, were still overruled of God for a short season in order to allow the infant Church to strike out its roots far and wide, that it might be prepared to stand the shock of the storm, which was so soon to burst upon it. We see even in this lull evidence of the bitter spirit of hatred and persecution, that was as eager as a blood-hound in its leash to be let loose, and

rush upon its prey, and tear and rend and be steeped in the blood of its victims. Nor was this spirit of bitterness confined to the Jews alone, or the Sadducean Council at Jerusalem; it was rapidly spreading into wider form and a more extended circle.

Of the various Synagogues at Jerusalem, we know comparatively but little. As every Jew, wherever he resided, or proselytes in foreign lands came up to Jerusalem, if possible, once at least in every year, to worship at the stated festivals, it is probable that each community, or, as it would appear here, two or three together, opened a place of meeting, where they could gather together not only for purposes of worship and communion, but, as we now read, for disputation and discussion. Of the five parties mentioned in the 9th verse, as disputing with Stephen, we find those of Cilicia included, and as Saul was of Cilicia we may, without much hesitation, include him among those fiery disputants and zealots. Hot from the school of Gamaliel, full of his master's burning hatred for the name of Jesus, and convinced that he ought to do everything to oppose the progress of what he deemed heresy, we may well imagine with what fierce and acrimonious bitterness he would throw himself into this dispute. Of all dissensions, religious dissension is the most bitter; as a man's worst foes are those of his own household, so his worst

opponents are those of his own faith. A Jew was not so exasperated against a Gentile as he would be against a brother-Jew: and, alas! alas! Christians have ever been found arrayed against Christians in the deadliest strife, and most unmitigated hatred.

The Lord, ever from time to time, raises up men fitted for the emergency that calls them forth, and, in some instances, intended only for that emergency, and then withdrawn from the scene. It had been so with the Baptist—his mission was as brief as it was glorious, as he himself describes it, only as "a voice" that leaves no echo behind. It is the same here with Stephen; he passes almost as a sunbeam over the historian's page, yet what a testimony is here vouchsafed! 'full of faith and power,' 'doing great wonders and miracles among the people,' and not one of his opponents 'able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake;' and so, like his Lord, of whose Spirit he had received so large a measure, he, too, was brought before the Council, where false witnesses laid to his charge things that he knew not. How truly might he have adopted the language of his persecutor in his own hour of peril, when he said, "But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto me, so that I may finish my course with joy, and the ministry which I have received of the Lord Jesus." So calm,

so serene, so radiant even, the hope that was in his heart, that every feature betokened the peace and joy and assurance that reigned within, as if to him, too, as to his Master, there had been sent an angel from heaven to comfort and strengthen him, and the brightness of that heavenly visitant still lingered in every look, and the light of God's countenance was still visible to every beholder.

SECTION XXXII.

CHAP. VII. 1—7. *Then said the High Priest, Are these things so? And he said, Men, brethren, and fathers, hearken: The God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham, when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Charran, and said unto him, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and come into the land which I shall shew thee. Then came he out of the land of the Chaldæans, and dwelt in Charran: and from thence, when his father was dead, he removed him into this land, wherein ye now dwell. And he gave him none inheritance in it, no, not so much as to set his foot on: yet he promised that he would give it to him for a possession, and to his seed after him, when as yet he had no child. And God spake on this wise, That his seed should sojourn in a strange land; and that they should bring them into bondage, and entreat them evil four hundred years. And the nation to whom they shall be in bondage will I judge, said God: and after that shall they come forth, and serve me in this place.*

I DO not know whether it has ever occurred to

any of you as you have read this defence of the first martyr Stephen, that you have thought it ill-adapted for the purpose he had in view, and perhaps, too, somewhat out of character with a man who was pleading for his life as well as God's truth. At first sight, indeed, it does seem at variance with what we might have thought the most likely topics to influence and arrest the fierce and turbulent passions of the Council before whom he was standing to answer the charge brought against him, and whose very first question was equivalent to our own 'Guilty, or not Guilty?' The indictment charged him first, in general terms, with blasphemy against the Temple, in the very precincts of which the Sanhedrim had their chambers, and were now sitting, and against the law; and then proceeded to the more minute allegation that he had predicted the return of Jesus of Nazareth in order to destroy "this place," and to change the customs, "the commandments, the statutes, and the judgments which Moses had delivered to them;" in one word, to abrogate the whole Mosaic ritual, and substitute another faith and another worship in its stead. On this charge it is that the High Priest asked of Stephen, 'Are these things so?' and to this charge his defence is especially directed.

Before, however, we enter on Stephen's address, let us for one moment glance at yon eager,

impassioned, exasperated audience before whom he is speaking, scarcely awed, though strangely perplexed at the heavenly serenity and composure which irradiated his countenance. No doubt there were among them the same admixture of Pharisee and Sadducee, hating one another with a bitter hatred, but for a season confederated by a still stronger hatred against the name of Jesus, which had before characterised their assemblies. Many, too, of those foreign Jews who had been so furious in their disputations with Stephen, and in whose hearts the sense of their inferiority and defeat was still rankling, the more bitter, perhaps, from the fact that Stephen, himself a Hellenistic or foreign Jew, might be looked upon as a renegade from their ranks. Among these, there is one whose eager eye is more intensely fastened than any other's on the speaker, but only in hate and scorn—not one gleam of love, or pity, or admiration brightens up that burning gaze with which he glares on the supposed blasphemer of the law of Moses, while one might also fancy his hands, in their restless movements, were already longing to grasp the stones that should be hurled upon his victim. This was that young man who was called Saul, bred up at the feet of that Gamaliel who, though he himself shrank from the obloquy and risk of open persecution, yet trained his disciples in the hatred of that faith, which he dared not say was

not of God. I think we have sufficient evidence in the future career of this "young man" how indelibly the remembrance of that day was rooted in the future Apostle's memory; how often, in after times, he recalled the look, the tone, the arguments, nay, almost the very language of that defence to which he was now listening in such impatient scorn.

But we must not forestall.

Stephen commences his address with that customary but courteous and dignified salutation of "Men and brethren;" but as he himself was probably comparatively young in years, and many of those who were sitting in judgment on him far more advanced in age, he adds the respectful and reverential title of "Fathers" as well,—"Men, brethren, and fathers;" thus claiming for himself kindred with them by the common and endeared ties of brotherhood and filial reverence.

It were derogatory to the Spirit of God, by whom Stephen spake, to say with what tact and judgment he commences his defence by at once bringing forward the common progenitor of their race, of whom he also claimed to be a son, for the very narrative of the call of Abraham, to which every Israelite would listen with gratified complacency, leads of necessity to the spiritual purpose which God had in view. It was no temporal inheritance which God gave to the patriarch personally: here, indeed, he had but

a temporary sojourning place, and that only in tents, ready to be taken down at a moment's warning, like the earthly tabernacle of his body. Abraham, he tells them, during life had not one spot of earth he could call his own—no, not even the scanty portion on which his tent stood, or his foot trod; and in death his only possession was his burying-place.

And did this comprise all God's promise when He appeared unto him in glory and called him? Were these the narrow limits of that fulness of the blessing, that "in his seed all the nations of the earth should be blessed"? Even the promised land, never bestowed on Abraham, was delayed for many hundred years to his descendants: through much tribulation and heavy bondage they were to pass ere they entered it, yet, like the solitary star in the midnight sky, that promise still shone, still beckoned. The patriarchs died in hope of it; their fathers, also, had entered into their rest, cheered by the same promise, and looking onward to the same heavenly home.

Oh! what a blessed truth to all God's children is that which one of those, who was now listening to Stephen's words, afterwards enunciated in all the fervour of assured hope and belief, "We know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." The patriarchs of old, as well as

prophets and martyrs, and Christian brothers and sisters now, had this hope set before them, and, like the star in the East that guided to Bethlehem, it still leads, as it has ever led, to Jesus.

SECTION XXXIII.

CHAP. VII. 8—16. *And he gave him the covenant of circumcision: and so Abraham begat Isaac, and circumcised him the eighth day; and Isaac begat Jacob; and Jacob begat the twelve patriarchs. And the patriarchs, moved with envy, sold Joseph into Egypt: but God was with him, and delivered him out of all his afflictions, and gave him favour and wisdom in the sight of Pharaoh king of Egypt; and he made him governor over Egypt and all his house. Now there came a dearth over all the land of Egypt and Chanaan, and great affliction: and our fathers found no sustenance. But when Jacob heard that there was corn in Egypt, he sent out our fathers first. And at the second time Joseph was made known to his brethren; and Joseph's kindred was made known unto Pharaoh. Then sent Joseph, and called his father Jacob to him, and all his kindred, threescore and fifteen souls. So Jacob went down into Egypt, and died, he, and our fathers, and were carried over into Sychem, and laid in the sepulchre that Abraham bought for a sum of money of the sons of Emmor the father of Sychem.*

IT was a natural and appropriate transition from the mention of their progenitor Abraham to that covenant of circumcision by which God afterwards

separated and sealed His people as His own. You remember how that "young man, Saul," in after years, reasoning with a supposed Jewish disputant, introduces this very same subject of Abraham's circumcision in confirmation of his own argument, that the blessedness of forgiveness of sin through a crucified Redeemer was intended for all, whether circumcised or uncircumcised; that is, for Gentile as well as Jew alike. Stephen, indeed, was not arguing this point; probably he knew it not; but that inference from his own premises, which he passed by in silence, how significantly does the future Apostle carry out to its full and legitimate extent! "God gave him (Abraham) the covenant of circumcision," are the words of Stephen, and there he stops, wishing, no doubt, that his audience should infer that he, too, like themselves, had been "circumcised the eighth day," and was, therefore, "of the stock of Israel."

Saul's words are almost the same. He (Abraham) received the seal of circumcision, but that inference from the words, which Stephen's audience might have drawn for themselves, one, indeed, of them did afterwards draw for himself, and irresistibly press home upon them, when his turn came to argue upon the inefficacy of circumcision as a title to God's favour.

When did the God of glory appear to our father Abraham? might Stephen have proceeded

to ask. In circumcision, or in uncircumcision? in uncircumcision surely. Long after his call, long after he had left Mesopotamia and dwelt in Charran, after Ishmael was born, and Isaac declared to be the promised seed in whom God's covenant should be established; then it was, and not till then, that "he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had, yet being uncircumcised."

It is evident, from the close of Stephen's address, where he calls his hearers "stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears," that he, too, was looking to that circumcision mainly which was not outward in the flesh, but to that which is inward, of the heart, in the spirit and not in the letter, and whose praise is not in the vain boasting of man in an outward ceremony, but in the approval of God, in whose sight circumcision (in itself) is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but the keeping of the commandments of God.

Leaving, however, Abraham and circumcision, the speaker next proceeds to the history of Joseph and his brethren, on which he dwells at some length. And was not Joseph eminently a type of Jesus, and in many of the circumstances of his life calculated to recall Him whom they, too, moved with envy, had delivered unto Pontius Pilate to be crucified and slain. Joseph had been sold by his own brethren for a slave, and at a

slave's price,—and a goodly price it was that Jesus was prized at of them. Joseph's feet, as their own Psalmist had said, they hurt with fetters, the iron entered into his soul; and of Jesus they pierced both the hands and the feet. And as, in God's appointed time, the King sent and loosed Joseph out of prison, and made him lord of his house and ruler of all his substance, so of Jesus it was not possible that He should be holden in the prison of the grave; but, when His time was come, God sent and let Him go free, and He, too, was exalted unto great honour and glory, higher than all the kings of the earth.

We need not pursue the familiar history of Joseph, as Stephen here touches upon it; yet there is one incident alluded to here which we do not gather from the history, but which very strikingly refers to that hope which, even in those early days when the sepulchre was their only inheritance, influenced all the patriarchs, and which still at this day lingers in the heart of every Jew. We find from the 16th verse that not only the bones of Jacob and Joseph, but of all his brethren, were carried up from Egypt, and laid in the same grave of their fathers. In their deaths they were not divided! How completely does the grave obliterate every difference, and how peacefully can those sleep side by side who in life, perhaps, were but the oppressor and the

victim! But, with Jacob and his sons, how strong their faith in the promises! Confessing, indeed, that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth, they yet were persuaded of them, and embraced them; and therefore it was that Jacob on his dying bed exclaimed, "Bury me with my fathers;" therefore it was that Joseph charged it by an oath on the children of Israel, "Carry up my bones" out of Egypt; therefore, too, it was that we find Stephen here declaring that all the patriarchs as well were carried over into Sychem, and finally laid in the sepulchre that Abraham had bought. And therefore, too, it is that to this day the heart of every Israelite, wherever his exile may be, turns with a longing look to the earthly Jerusalem, and earnestly desires that his bones may lie in its hallowed soil; and many an aged man sets out on his weary pilgrimage to that land of his earnest love, though he knows that when he reaches it, he too shall have no inheritance in it—no, not so much as to set his foot on, save that spot wherein his bones shall lie: blessed beyond expression, he believes, if his feet but stand within thy gates, O Jerusalem!

SECTION XXXIV.

CHAP. VII. 17—29. *But when the time of the promise drew nigh, which God had sworn to Abraham, the people grew and multiplied in Egypt, till another king arose which knew not Joseph. The same dealt subtilly with our kindred, and evil entreated our fathers, so that they cast out their young children, to the end they might not live. In which time Moses was born, and was exceeding fair, and nourished up in his father's house three months: and when he was cast out, Pharaoh's daughter took him up, and nourished him for her own son. And Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and in deeds. And when he was full forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his brethren the children of Israel. And seeing one of them suffer wrong, he defended him, and avenged him that was oppressed, and smote the Egyptian: for he supposed his brethren would have understood how that God by his hand would deliver them: but they understood not. And the next day he shewed himself unto them as they strove, and would have set them at one again, saying, Sirs, ye are brethren; why do ye wrong one to another? But he that did his neighbour wrong thrust him away, saying, Who made thee a ruler and a judge over us? Wilt thou kill me, as thou diddest the Egyptian yesterday? Then fled Moses at this saying, and was a stranger in the land of Madian, where he begat two sons.*

GOD'S purposes of mercy and God's promises of love to man are not to be weighed in human scales, nor estimated by human judgment. "He doubly gives who quickly gives," is man's natural and appropriate measure. Man has but a short

time in which either to give or to receive kindness, and the opportunity that is suffered to pass to-day may not return to-morrow—it may be beyond the reach of regret or recall, like the current of a river that is speeding onwards to the ocean.* It is not so with Him who is from everlasting to everlasting, the Creator of time, and to whom a thousand years and a single day are both alike. We measure time and apportion our purposes by the limits of human life, the threescore years and ten allotted to us: there is no time in eternity; days and months and years are unknown in heaven.

And yet God in His dealings with man graciously condescends to reckon by years—but at what an immeasurable distance! what an inconceivable difference! "The seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent's head" was God's first promise to man, and yet 4,000 years rolled on ere the fulness of God's time was come; so, "unto thy seed will I give this land" was God's promise to Abraham, and yet 430 years passed away ere it was fulfilled. And not only that, but, in the latter portion of the time, for upwards of two hundred years, every obstacle, every event that could apparently thwart and tend to falsify the Lord's word thickened around that chosen race.

* "Rusticus expectat, dum defluat amnis; at ille
Labitur et labetur in omne volubilis ævum."
—Hor. *Epist.*

In a foreign land, admitted at the first only by sufferance and through the powerful influence of one man, and even then their name, their lineage, their occupation, nay, their very contact, hateful to those among whom they dwelt; and, as in the lapse of years the remembrance of the one great benefactor grew weaker and weaker, and their numbers increased, objects alike of jealousy and dread, till another king arose who knew not Joseph, and only looked on the alien race as objects of abhorrence and suspicion, whom policy bade him crush, and who for that purpose issued edict upon edict for their subjugation and final extinction. But "the more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and grew," and in that very edict, that every man-child that was born of Israel's race should be put to death, God ordained the very instrument of deliverance should be raised up.

It was, then, a natural inference, which Stephen's audience might have drawn for themselves, and which, indeed, Gamaliel, had previously drawn for them, that man could not overthrow the purpose nor annul the will of God. Their own forefathers in the land of Egypt were but a type of the Lord's people in every age—persecuted, but never forsaken—cast down, but not destroyed—like that bush which Moses saw in Horeb, or those Jewish youths in the midst of the burning fiery furnace, unharmed and with the Son of God by their side.

Herod and his men of war, Pontius Pilate and his soldiers, the High Priest and his Sanhedrim, with the people of Israel, had, it is true, gathered together against the Lord and His Christ—they had, as they deemed, succeeded in their plan, for Jesus hung upon the cross. Yet in that very deed God's purpose was accomplished—from that cross on which He hung, and from that grave wherein He lay, deliverance and redemption came. And yet, to human eye and human judgment, it seemed as little likely, as when that Israelitish babe, in its ark of bulrushes, was hidden among the flags which grew by the river's side, that from that tiny cradle should come forth a deliverer to Israel. And yet so it was; and that very edict by which the babe was denied a shelter beneath its parents' roof, became, in God's providence, the especial means whereby Moses was fitted for his work. A tyrant's rage and a tyrant's will might compel his servile drudges to build him treasure-cities and tombs, but at the same time one was growing up, probably within the precincts of his own palace, who, on "the very selfsame day" on which the Lord had appointed, at the close of 430 years—not one moment before, nor one moment after—should bring His people out of Egypt.

Moses indeed would have forestalled the Lord's purpose; he thought he saw an intimation of the Lord's will in the impulses of his own heart, and would have listened to that voice as a safe and

unerring guide. It does not appear, nor do I think we are at liberty to suppose, that God gave any sanction to the rash and hasty deed of Moses, though He educed good out of evil: and I doubt not that in those forty years of comparatively solitary life in the Midianitish wilderness, God was as effectually carrying on the discipline and the training of the future leader of Israel, as when He placed him in the palace of Pharaoh's daughter, and had him instructed in all the learning and wisdom of Egypt's philosophy and schools. Nor can I doubt that there was one listening to Stephen's words on that memorable day, who, though unconsciously to himself, was recording every word in his heart, and who himself tells the story how Moses by faith refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, and how by the same faith he forsook Egypt and all its hopes and prospects. Yes! we may well say of the Lord's work, in the words of his prophet, "A little one shall become a thousand, and a small one a strong nation: I, the Lord, will hasten it in his time."

SECTION XXXV.

CHAP. VII. 30—41. *And when forty years were expired, there appeared to him in the wilderness of mount Sina an angel of the Lord in a flame of fire in a bush. When*

Moses saw it, he wondered at the sight: and as he drew near to behold it, the voice of the Lord came unto him, saying, I am the God of thy fathers, the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. Then Moses trembled, and durst not behold. Then said the Lord to him, Put off thy shoes from thy feet: for the place where thou standest is holy ground. I have seen, I have seen the affliction of my people which is in Egypt, and I have heard their groaning, and am come down to deliver them. And now come, I will send thee into Egypt. This Moses whom they refused, saying, Who made thee a ruler and a judge? the same did God send to be a ruler and a deliverer by the hand of the angel which appeared to him in the bush. He brought them out, after that he had shewed wonders and signs in the land of Egypt, and in the Red sea, and in the wilderness forty years. This is that Moses, which said unto the children of Israel, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear. This is he, that was in the church in the wilderness with the angel which spake to him in the mount Sina, and with our fathers: who received the lively oracles to give unto us: to whom our fathers would not obey, but thrust him from them, and in their hearts turned back again into Egypt, saying unto Aaron, Make us gods to go before us: for as for this Moses, which brought us out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him. And they made a calf in those days, and offered sacrifice unto the idol, and rejoiced in the works of their own hands.

THIS burning bush in the wilderness was not only an apt representation to Moses of God's Church in Israel at the time when the symbol was manifested to him, but it has ever been considered as a lively emblem of God's Church in that nation, till that millennial day shall dawn, in which the

light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun shall be sevenfold as the light of seven days, in the day that the Lord bindeth up the breach of his people and healeth the stroke of their wound.

The Church of Israel was at a low ebb, a mere flickering flame just ready to expire in the day of their heavy bondage in Egypt,—yet still it was not consumed: it was in a still lower condition in that land of their captivity, when for their sins they sat down by the river of Babylon and wept as they remembered Zion. And far lowest of all has it been since that day when her enemies cast a trench about her and compassed her round and kept her in on every side, and laid her even with the ground and her children within her, and left not in her one stone upon another, either of city or temple, because she knew not the day of her visitation. And still the bush burns on, and is not consumed! The living miracle which met the eyes of that solitary Midianitish shepherd, as he tended his flock in Horeb more than 3,300 years ago, has been perpetuated through every age and every generation; nay, every individual of Abraham's race, as we see him bearing a charmed life through the far drearier wilderness of the world's haunts, through which God has doomed him to pass, is still a standing miracle and a living emblem of that unconsumed bush in the

midst of the flames, and of the voice of God issuing from out of the fire.

When, indeed, Moses turned aside to see that great sight, it was God's appointed time of deliverance for his people,—it is not so now,—but I would wish you to remark with what affectionate and loving reiteration the Lord repeats the gracious assurance, "I have seen, I have seen the affliction of my people, I have heard their groaning;" and in the book of Exodus there is a sweet addition, "I know their sorrows." Oh, what a balm for every mourner's heart; what a word to be whispered in some sorrowing chamber like that of Bethany, when one can almost hear the broken-hearted sisters exclaiming, "If He were but here, our brother would not die;" "and He is here," may each weeping one say, "He knoweth our sorrows." It is not the mere knowledge that God seeth us, but it is his voice whispering to his child's heart in its hour of trial, "It is I, be not afraid." I do not of course say that he hears it by the hearing of the ear, that the audible sound of the Lord's voice breaks in upon his grief as it did on Moses, when he heard the very words of God out of the midst of the bush—but there is the Spirit of God himself witnessing with his spirit that it is addressed to Him, though it be in a way that he knows not, and by a channel he can neither understand nor

explain. "I know and am persuaded" that it is so, and I know also that the testimony of thousands upon thousands of the Lord's sorrowing ones will avouch the preciousness and sweetness of that truth, that the Lord knows all their sorrows.

And in the case of Israel this knowledge was the precursor of deliverance—"I am come down to deliver them; and now come, I will send thee into Egypt." And yet this very Moses they had refused and rejected as a ruler and a judge. "He too came unto his own and his own received him not:" his citizens sent after him too, saying, "We will not have this man to rule over us," and went to Aaron and asked him to make them a molten calf to guide them back into the land of their captivity. Their fathers, then, had rejected Moses, though commissioned and sent of God, and though they both read and acknowledged the Lord's credentials to his servant in the signs which he showed among them, and his wonders in the land of Ham, and though they too might have said to Moses as one of their own body had said to Jesus, "No man can do these miracles that Thou doest except God be with him," yet they rejected Moses, as they had now rejected Jesus. Of the one they contemptuously said, "As for this Moses, we wot not what is become of him," and of Jesus, with strange and glaring inconsistency, using almost the very language of their fathers, they said, "We know that

God spake unto Moses,—as for this fellow, we know not whence he is." And yet Jesus had expressly declared, "Had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me, for he wrote of me"; and so Stephen here, as expressly and explicitly declares that this was this very Moses who had said unto the children of Israel, "A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren like unto me; him shall ye hear." Alas! alas! as Jesus said, "If they believe not Moses' writings, how shall they believe my words?" In rejecting the one, they rejected the other also.

SECTION XXXVI.

CHAP. VII. 42—53. *Then God turned, and gave them up to worship the host of heaven; as it is written in the book of the prophets, O ye house of Israel, have ye offered to me slain beasts and sacrifices by the space of forty years in the wilderness? Yea, ye took up the tabernacle of Moloch, and the star of your god Remphan, figures which ye made to worship them; and I will carry you away beyond Babylon. Our fathers had the tabernacle of witness in the wilderness, as he had appointed, speaking unto Moses, that he should make it according to the fashion that he had seen. Which also our fathers that came after brought in with Jesus into the possession of the Gentiles, whom God drave out before the face of our fathers, unto the days of David; who found favour before God, and desired to find a tabernacle for the God of Jacob. But Solomon built*

him an house. Howbeit the most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands; as saith the prophet, Heaven is my throne, and earth is my footstool: what house will ye build me? saith the Lord: or what is the place of my rest? Hath not my hand made all these things? Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye. Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? and they have slain them which shewed before of the coming of the Just One; of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers: who have received the law by the disposition of angels, and have not kept it.

ONE can well imagine this assembly beginning to writhe under Stephen's close and searching application of his quotations from their own Scriptures; and how manifestly they would exhibit their impatience and eagerness to interrupt him. But, earnest only to declare all God's truth, while the opportunity was vouchsafed, the speaker heeds not the rising symptoms of anger manifested in the fierce looks and gestures of those around him, and only hastens on to show with more explicit distinctness, how, even in times past, no outward privileges had secured the obedience and fidelity of their forefathers, starting aside like a broken bow to enter on every path of idolatry that seduced them from allegiance to Jehovah; and that, as God had punished their iniquity once by sending them into captivity, and destroying even that temple of Solomon, of which the Lord had said that He would place his Name there, so there was

no treason nor blasphemy now in declaring that their rejection of Jesus would fill up the measure of their iniquities, and doom them to a heavier bondage and a more protracted exile even than those of Egypt or Babylon.

It is true God permitteth, nay, loveth, the earthly habitations of His Name: in tender condescension to the necessities and infirmities of man He has ever allowed an earthly house to be raised up, made with hands, temporary on the earth, which house, as it has fulfilled its purpose in its generation, has been done away, and another substituted as a tabernacle of witness unto all generations. It was so even in Israel's wanderings in the wilderness, where they had no settled habitation, dwelling in tents only; and God disdained not to dwell in a tabernacle also, as He Himself had said, "Let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them; according to all that I shew thee, after the pattern of the tabernacle, and the pattern of all the instruments thereof, even so shall ye make it." And even this tabernacle Joshua brought with them into the promised land, and there for 440 years was that tabernacle God's house, till Solomon built a nobler edifice. Then was the first tabernacle taken down; it had fulfilled its mission, it had accomplished its work. But even this temple of Solomon's, in all its glory and magnificence, in its exuberant wealth and overflowing grandeur, lasted not even the time of

the first tabernacle, and was gradually stripped of all its treasures, till, when the measure of Judah's sin was filled up, then did their enemies cast fire into the sanctuary, and defiled it, by casting down God's dwelling-place to the ground.

Again, however, had the temple risen from its ruins—again had they adorned it with goodly stones and gifts, and, according to their own calculation, "forty and six years had this temple been in building." And yet the predicted hour was now coming, when neither on Gerizim's mountain nor yet at Jerusalem were men to worship the Father. "God is a spirit," said Jesus, "and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth," even as their own prophet Isaiah had testified, nearly 800 years before, that a poor, contrite spirit was of more esteem in the sight of Him whose throne was heaven, and whose footstool earth, than the most gorgeous house of man's building.

There can be little doubt that at this moment Stephen's audience were so visibly excited and exasperated by this bold denunciation, that their victim could not but read his own fate in the fierce passions that were depicted on every countenance; and therefore he himself breaks off in the thread of his discourse to address to them that fearful and undaunted denunciation of God's wrath against the hardness and obstinacy of their hearts: "Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in

heart and ears, ye do resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye." It was, indeed, Stephen's voice and Stephen's words, but he was speaking as the Holy Ghost gave him utterance; and, as Moses had said to their fathers, so might he have said to them, "Your murmurings are not against me, but against the Lord."

"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem! thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee, it cannot be that a prophet perish out of Jerusalem," and thou art now ready, yea, and eager, to fill up the measure of that blood which from the time of righteous Abel has been poured out upon the earth, of God's martyrs, till the coming of that Just One, of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers. Fill ye up, then, the measure of your fathers! How can ye escape the damnation of hell, who, having received the law from the hands of God Himself amid His marshalled hosts of angels have yet not kept it?

How must one of that number of furious ones have afterwards recalled the martyr's last words, when he, too, wrote to his own unbelieving countrymen, "He that despised Moses' law died without mercy: of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?"

SECTION XXXVII.

CHAP. VII. 54—60. *When they heard these things, they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed on him with their teeth. But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up stedfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God, and said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God. Then they cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord, and cast him out of the city, and stoned him: and the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul. And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep.*

IT has been often said that short is the space that lies between the dungeon and the scaffold; but, short as it is, it was far shorter in the case of the martyr Stephen. There was no cell to which he was consigned, even for a few hours, to prepare for death—there was no judicial sentence passed upon him. It was not even as in the case of his Lord; He, though hurried straightway from the tribunal of the judge to the cross of the malefactor, had yet the semblance of justice: "Ye have heard the blasphemy; what think ye?" was the High Priest's appeal to the assembled council —"and they all condemned him to be guilty of death." It was, no doubt, a mockery, but still

there was a semblance of judicial form. Here it was far otherwise—hurried on by their exasperated rancour even to the most unseemly gestures and indecent actions, and, in all the ungovernableness of unrestrained rage, gnashing their very teeth, like a wild beast over its prey.

"In your patience possess ye your souls" was his Master's injunction to His disciples, in the very circumstances in which His servant was now placed. It is true He added, also, "There shall not a hair of your head perish." But, even in that hour of peril, Stephen had already that spirit which one of his present persecutors afterwards described so touchingly as his own, and he might have truly forestalled Paul's own language, and declared of himself, "Whether I live, I live unto the Lord; and whether I die, I die unto the Lord; whether I live, therefore, or whether I die, I am the Lord's." And, as a dying martyr in after ages said, "So that I come, Lord, to Thee, what matters it though it be in a chariot of fire?"

No doubt there was vouchsafed to Stephen that which might have borne him triumphant through the deepest waters and the most scorching fires. He, too, like his Master, could have said to those who were glaring on him with such bitter hatred, "I have meat to eat, that you know not of." And it was so in reality. It was no enthusiast's dream, no fanatic's vision, no deception of dis-

tempered imagination: "full of the Holy Ghost," and "looking up stedfastly into heaven" in calm assurance, and undoubting trust in a Father's power and a Saviour's love,—then was vouchsafed to him that wondrous manifestation of the glory of Jesus, which had never yet been revealed to mortal eye; then was seen, still in form and fashion as a man, the risen and ascended Saviour, at the right hand of God, not seated in the attitude of repose as one entered into his rest, but, "standing" ready, not so much to hasten to his servant's rescue as to receive the returning spirit, as it winged its flight upwards, and ready to welcome it, as it entered the everlasting gates with "Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful unto death, and here is the crown of life ready for thy brow."

I do not say, nor do I believe, that every martyr of the Lord Jesus Christ has had the same open vision revealed to him, as here met the enraptured gaze of this first martyr of the Christian Church; but I do believe that to many and many a dying one of the Lord's family is something of the same glorious scene presented even in the hour of death; and though there may be indistinctness in the vision to all earthly objects, and no power of utterance in the lips; though to the outward sight of weeping friends and relatives around all may appear a blank and unconscious insensibility, yet even before that dimmed and closed eye may

be visible forms and sights and glories in that brighter home to which the spirit is hastening.

I remember once standing by the dying bed of a Christian girl,—she was unconscious of all around, and lying in such motionless and noiseless stupor, that her mother deemed her already dead, and stooped down to imprint a last kiss upon her brow. The pressure of a mother's lips seemed for a moment to recall the departing spirit; the dying girl just opened her eyes, a smile, such as earth never gave, played upon her lips, and she faintly uttered, "Oh, mother! don't detain me;" and she, too, fell asleep in Jesus.

How entirely, too, had that glorious manifestation of the Lord not merely overcome the fear of suffering and death, but, if we may so speak, had moulded every feeling of the martyr's heart into perfect conformity with the spirit that was in Jesus. If in His dying moments the expiring Saviour cried, "Father! into thy hands I commend my spirit," so the expiring martyr cried, "Lord Jesus! receive my spirit!" Then the prayer was *from* Jesus, now it is *to* Jesus; then it was from Jesus on His cross of shame on earth, now it is to Jesus in heaven, at the right hand of God Himself, God blessed for evermore! Did Jesus, with His last accents of love, pray for His murderers, "Father! forgive them, for they know not what they do!" So did Stephen with his last accents breathe the same prayer of love for those

that were crushing him to death, "Lord! lay not this sin to their charge!"

More than thirty years after, another servant of the Lord Jesus went to his martyrdom for the same noble testimony, and we have the very language in which he, too, welcomed his blood-stained end. "I am now ready to be offered, the time of my departure is at hand; henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness which the Lord the righteous Judge shall give me at that day." This later martyr was he that held the clothes of those that were stoning Stephen. We can only cry out in his own words of astonishment and gratitude, "O the depth of the riches, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out!"

SECTION XXXVIII.

CHAP. VIII. 1—8. *And Saul was consenting unto his death. And at that time there was a great persecution against the Church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him. As for Saul, he made havock of the Church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison. Therefore they that were scattered abroad went*

everywhere preaching the word. Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them. And the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did. For unclean spirits, crying with loud voice, came out of many that were possessed with them: and many taken with palsies, and that were lame, were healed. And there was great joy in that city.

THE first sentence of this chapter, "And Saul was consenting unto his death," evidently belongs to the preceding one, and the present chapter should begin with the mention of the persecution that arose after the death of Stephen. The historian, however, for a moment stops in the midst of his narrative to record how devout men carried Stephen to his burial and made great lamentation over him. It was the first rent made by death in their community, at least of which we read, and that, too, under such circumstances of horror and atrocity, that when they gathered up his crushed and mangled remains, they would in all probability hardly recognise those features which had so lately beamed with heavenly and seraphic radiance.

At this distant day we who now read the narrative of Stephen's death, of the vision of glory that was vouchsafed to him, of his exclamation of triumph at the sight, of the earnest committal of his soul into his Saviour's hands as of One mighty to save, and his forgiving prayer so full of love for his murderers, and how death,

even in the agonizing form in which it came, was to the departing Saint only as a calm and peaceful slumber—we, I say, knowing and reading all this, are more ready, perhaps, to exclaim, "Oh, that my last end were like his!" and can hardly understand why such great lamentation should have been made over such a death. And yet there was abundant cause for anxiety and sorrow: could the voice of Stephen have been heard from that grave to which these devout men were consigning their companion's remains, he might have said in his Master's words, "Weep not for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children; for, behold, days of persecution, cruelty, and outrage are at hand." The storm that broke over the Christian community ceased not at the death of the first martyr; the rage that had spilled the blood of Stephen was not satisfied till it could glut itself with more, and so fiercely did the tempest break forth over the persecuted Church, that its members were scattered in every direction, wherever they could find shelter in the different districts of Judea and Samaria.

Saul, too, no doubt now an authorised servant, and it may be a member of the Sanhedrim, is especially mentioned as leading and organising the persecution; as he himself afterwards describes his own proceedings, "How that beyond measure he persecuted the Church of God and wasted it." Yet still how wonderfully was all

overruled of God to the furtherance of the Gospel! And the very means by which man, in his short-sightedness, thought to crush and to destroy, became the appointed channel by which the waters of Gospel-truth and love were conveyed to other and remoter districts.

And yet it is evident that no unseemly terror, no coward fears, dictated this dispersion of the disciples; all was no doubt done in obedience to the directions of the Holy Spirit, and according to the will of Him who permitted the hurricane to rage, and, as in the natural world, "made the fire, and the hail, and the stormy wind to fulfil his word," wafting and dispersing on its wings the seed of eternal life. And as, too, in the natural storm, while the lighter and more buoyant materials are driven and drifted wherever the gale may carry them, the deep rooted tree remains unshaken in its firm foundation; so here too, while deacons and disciples are scattered in every direction, the Apostles, equally obedient to the Holy Spirit's guidance, remained unscathed and unmoved at their posts, undeterred by danger and unharmed amidst havoc.

What wonderful support and comfort, too, does this portion of our chapter afford to a bereaved and mourning Church, "smitten of God, and afflicted" in the withdrawal of some loved and loving pastor in whose ministrations they have long rejoiced, and in whose teaching and spiritual

guidance they have felt their own souls edified and encouraged, and over whose premature removal they may be sorrowing and crying out like the prophet of old, even as his eye followed his master's course on his heavenward track, "My father, my father! the chariots of Israel and the horsemen thereof!" It was so here; devout men made great lamentation over Stephen, not for his gain and removal to a happier and brighter home, but for their own and the Church's loss, sorrowing, like the Ephesian Church afterwards over their minister, that they should see his face no more. And lo! Stephen is withdrawn, but Philip, another of that goodly band of seven, takes his place, and with far greater demonstration of the Spirit's power than as far as we know ever attended Stephen's ministry, carried the Gospel to *a* city of Samaria,* probably Sychar; those fields over which Jesus had once gazed and pronounced already white to the harvest,—those more docile people among whom He had himself once tarried, and many became believers of His word. And now once more in Sychar there was great joy; and from Samaritan as well as Jewish lips might the joyous tale be told, how "the Lord hath visited and redeemed his people, and hath raised up an horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David, as he spake by the mouth of his holy prophets."

* εἰς πόλιν τῆς Σαμαρείας.

SECTION XXXIX.

CHAP. VIII. 9—24. *But there was a certain man, called Simon, which beforetime in the same city used sorcery and bewitched the people of Samaria, giving out that himself was some great one: to whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, This man is the great power of God. And to him they had regard, because that of long time he had bewitched them with sorceries. But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. Then Simon himself believed also: and when he was baptized he continued with Philip, and wondered, beholding the miracles and signs which were done. Now when the apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the Word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John: who when they were come down, prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Ghost: (for as yet he was fallen upon none of them: only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.) Then laid they their hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost. And when Simon saw that through laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Ghost was given, he offered them money, saying, Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost. But Peter said unto him, Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money. Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right in the sight of God. Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee. For I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity. Then answered Simon, and said, Pray ye to the Lord for me, that none of these things which ye have spoken come upon me.*

This episode of Simon's story contains some very important subjects for our consideration. It is in some measure an illustration of our Lord's parable when an enemy sowed bad seed among the good. It ever has been so since the day when that enemy crept stealthily into Paradise and scattered his obnoxious seed in that garden of the Lord, and of which sin and death were the abundant produce. We find continual allusions to this practice of sorcery from the earliest time of Israel, and no doubt brought by them with other evil habits and inclinations out of Egypt, in which land we read of magicians and sorcerers attempting by their enchantments to vie with Moses the servant of the Lord. It is the natural propensity of the human mind, and even in Christian lands it was long their stain and reproach; and I know of no page in our own annals so humiliating as that which records "the history of witchcraft," and all those outrages of cruelty to which its supposed professors were so barbarously exposed. In the case here recorded, Simon seems to have been one who lived upon the credulity of those around him, and to have taken advantage of that propensity of men's minds for the furtherance of his own interests. It is, however, to his credit that he did not apparently resist the impression made by Philip, or in any way thwart or impede the influence he was acquiring among the people; nay, so far from it, he seems to have

himself yielded to the conviction that Philip was working by a power far superior to his own, and instead of jealousy and envy at the success that attended his ministry, became himself a convert to the faith, and was so far at least sincere in his profession of belief, that he received the rite of baptism at Philip's hands, and remained with him as an attendant on the word, wondering at the signs and miracles which he witnessed.

Up to this point, then, and to this extent, I believe Simon to have been sincere; I mean that he was seriously impressed with the conviction that there was truth in Philip's miracles. He saw him exercising a power to which he was conscious he himself had no pretensions, and he was therefore not unwilling to be enrolled under the banner of Christ's followers. But, alas! Simon is not the only instance that conviction is not conversion. Assuredly Philip was deceived in his estimate of his character; it was not given to him to read the heart of man any more than I suppose it was given to others, save for especial purposes. Even in those early days of the Christian Church the Apostles themselves, as well as others, were most probably left to the same guidance of human judgment as to the inward feelings and sincerity of converts as we are now. "The Lord seeth not as man seeth, for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart." I imagine Ananias and Sapphira had been equally

received into the Church by baptism as Simon was here, and yet in neither case could that rite have been accompanied by the inward anointing of the Holy Spirit of God. Simon, though outwardly joined to the Church, was from the very first a dead and unsightly branch; he had no part nor lot in the matter, his heart was not right in the sight of God; he was, as before, so after his baptism, still in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity.

It is evident from the narrative here that there was a marked distinction between the miraculous gifts and powers of the Holy Ghost, and that inward grace and new birth unto righteousness which our Lord so explicitly declared essential to all who should enter the kingdom of heaven. But as those extraordinary and miraculous gifts were evidently not inherent in baptism, so neither were a death unto sin and a new birth unto righteousness; for Simon, like the rest, had been baptized. But when the Apostles, Peter and John, hearing of the great work going on in Samaria, came down there to strengthen and confirm Philip's work, and prayed that these new converts might receive the Holy Ghost; then it was that the Lord at once made manifest the sincerity of the one, while He laid bare the hypocrisy of the other. It was no personal grace which Simon sought, no closer communion with God he coveted, no admission for himself into the kingdom of heaven

he would have purchased; but that he might have the power to confer miraculous gifts on whomsoever he should lay his hands.

The outburst of holy indignation on the part of Peter is very striking,—"Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money." The name, indeed, of "Simony" has come down to our own times, though inappropriately, as I think, to our Protestant Church; but its sin most assuredly cleaves to that Church, which unblushingly sets to sale the gift of God, and affixes its own scale of prices to that forgiveness and remission of sins for the living and the dead, which the blood of Jesus alone can purchase. There does seem a judicial infatuation in that supposed successor of St. Peter, which dares to offer to sell what Peter so unequivocally denounces, and the Word of God so fearfully condemns. And one is almost inclined to exclaim of every indulgence, and every mass for a soul in purgatory, sold and purchased in the Church of Rome, in the indignant language of the Apostle, "Thy money perish with thee, because though hast thought that the gift of God could be purchased with money!"

I think, too, that even Simon, with all his ignorance and perversion might teach the members of the Church of Rome a valuable lesson. He [illegible]ks, indeed, the prayers of Peter and John on his

behalf; but it is to God himself that he would have them pray, "*Pray ye to the Lord for me.*" Peter and John were at the moment bidding him to pray God that the thought of his heart might be forgiven him,—and we know not—we would rather hope and believe that he did pray for himself as well as ask the prayers of others; and we may hope, though we dare not assert, that the "effectual fervent prayer of these righteous men availed much" even for Simon's sin.*

SECTION XL.

CHAP. VIII. 25—29. *And they, when they had testified and preached the word of the Lord, returned to Jerusalem, and preached the Gospel in many villages of the Samaritans. And the angel of the Lord spake unto Philip, saying, Arise, and go toward the south unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza, which is desert. And he arose and went: and, behold, a man of Ethiopia, an eunuch of great authority under Candace queen of the Ethiopians, who had the charge of all her treasure, and*

* I am aware that the Simon Magus mentioned by Josephus in the 20th book of his "Antiquities" in such degrading connexion with Felix and Drusilla is generally supposed to have been the Simon of this chapter; and one cannot deny that there is much ground for the supposition. If it be so, he is another melancholy instance, that a man may go a great way in religious profession, and yet "have neither part nor lot in the matter."

had come to Jerusalem for to worship, was returning, and sitting in his chariot read Esaias the prophet. Then the Spirit said unto Philip, Go near, and join thyself to this chariot.

I HAVE ever thought this narrative of Philip and the eunuch one of the most interesting, perhaps the most interesting, of all that are recorded in these apostolic annals. Every incident is so graphically brought before us, the picture so highly wrought and vividly represented, that we seem ourselves to be spectators, if not actors, in the very scenes it describes, and to hear the actual conversation that passed between these two pilgrims of the desert. But to us a light is given which the Ethiopian eunuch saw not; to him indeed the meeting between himself and the solitary traveller that accosted him on that lonely road was altogether casual. He might no doubt have felt and said how fortunate, nay, how providential, it was that he should have fallen in with so intelligent and valuable a companion at so critical a moment; but he knew not that over his own pathway the eye of God was resting in mercy and in love, nor that an angel of the Lord had been commissioned to direct that traveller's steps towards him, and point out the very road and the very spot where the appointed duty awaited him.

I think we may read in this preliminary portion of our narrative a very valuable testimony

which the Lord has affixed to missionary work, and how he sends forth his servants on their respective errands by his own especial appointment and commission. An angel is indeed employed, but what is that angel's work? Himself an heavenly messenger to send the earthly missionary, to direct the human teacher to go and win a soul to Christ.

I know not whether this minister of the Ethiopian queen was a Jew, he was assuredly a proselyte, and at any rate he knew and valued the Jewish scriptures. Many a one in these days, I doubt not, travels with a Bible in his pocket, and is found reading it as he pursues his journey; and many more, one is glad to acknowledge, find in their inn chamber at night a copy of the Word of God to invite their perusal and meditation in the night-watches. But still what is called "the light reading of the railway," is, I fear, more acceptable to the generality of travellers. It was not so here; we know the book this traveller had chosen for his companion on the road; we, too, are permitted to glance upon his page, and with him read the wondrous story he had turned to, accidentally he might think, but which we know the Holy Spirit of God had especially appointed him to open.

It was the wondrous story of Jesus—not of Jesus in the glory which He had with the Father before the world was, not as King of kings and Lord of lords, not as He who should sit on the throne of

his father David and before whom all kings should fall down and all nations do him service—but of Jesus in his humiliation and his shame, subject to all the outrages of cruelty and torture, led like a sheep to the slaughter, and yet uncomplaining as the lamb in the hands of its shearer. It was, in fact, a portion of the 53d chapter of Isaiah, that most wondrous and touching of all chapters, which this traveller had opened. * No sufferer's name was mentioned, no clue, as he read, guided him to its meaning. Was the prophet speaking of himself, depicting his own sufferings and sketching his own character? That could hardly be, how could *his* soul be an offering for sin, or the Lord lay on him the iniquity of us all? Was it then of some other the prophet spake? who was that other? who could it be, that for man's sake was so wounded and bruised of the Lord?

"If any man will do His will," said Jesus to the Jews, "he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself." And how abundantly was this promise realized to this inquiring traveller! how immediately, as he sought, did he find! while he was still musing on the hidden meaning of those mysterious words he had been reading, and perhaps in the silent recesses of his heart lifting up his heart for some

* Hornbeck tells us of a Jew, who was converted to the Christian faith by this 53d chapter of Isaiah, and who declared of it in after life, "plus millies illud caput perlegi."

spiritual guide and instructor, "O that there were some one to teach me what this meaneth!" and lo! even as it was with the prophet, "when I, even I Daniel, sought for the meaning, then, behold, there stood before me as the appearance of a man." One loves to read these gracious revelations of the workings of God's Holy Spirit, how He is the director of all things to Christ's church and people on earth; and that what seems to us and our limited vision merely the results of incidental circumstances, is in reality the appointment of the Holy Ghost. "It seemed good to the Holy Ghost." "The Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them." "Being sent forth by the Holy Ghost," are the intimations of His work in the early days of the Church; and so here as this traveller is needing and wishing for some guide to instruct and enlighten, the Holy Spirit had already prepared the very teacher he required.

And I think, too, we learn a very instructive lesson from the instant and ready obedience of that teacher. He was engaged in the Lord's work in Samaria; great success had attended his ministrations, and while still carrying on that work he was suddenly summoned forth on a wearisome and lengthened journey, no purpose named, no end assigned, no work suggested. "Arise, go toward the south unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem to Gaza, which is desert," was the

simple intimation he received. "And he arose and went;" like his progenitor Abraham, "when he was called to go out, he obeyed and went out." And how instantly did the Lord's purpose meet him by the way, with what wonderful minuteness and accuracy did every incident and moment of time dove-tail, as it were, one into the other! He reached the appointed spot at the very instant the traveller's chariot was passing by; it might have speeded onwards on its road heedless of the way-side traveller on foot, or Philip in his ignorance have forborne to accost its inmate; but the Spirit again directed his steps, like the star that guided the eastern sages and stood over the very house where the young child was. "Go near and join thyself to *this* chariot" was the injunction. And ashe drew nigh he heard the very words the traveller was reading, that very passage of His own word, which the Holy Spirit had directed that traveller to open! How wonderful the love and mercy of God! Of what stupendous value in His sight is the soul even of one man! and what wondrous machinery does He set in motion to accomplish its salvation! A solitary traveller going down to Egypt, and yet for the salvation of that soul an angel of the Lord sent forth on his errand of mercy, a missionary sent on a long and troublesome journey, the Holy Spirit of God working with him, and overruling and directing all, and, as the crowning mercy, Jesus *preached* unto him!

SECTION XLI.

CHAP. VIII. 30—40. *And Philip ran thither to him, and heard him read the prophet Esaias, and said, Understandest thou what thou readest? And he said, How can I, except some man should guide me? And he desired Philip that he would come up and sit with him. The place of the Scripture which he read was this, He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and like a lamb dumb before his shearer, so opened he not his mouth: in his humiliation his judgment was taken away: and who shall declare his gèneration? for his life is taken from the earth. And the eunuch answered Philip, and said, I pray thee, of whom speaketh the prophet this? of himself, or of some other man? Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same Scripture, and preached unto him Jesus. And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized? And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him. And when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip, that the eunuch saw him no more: and he went on his way rejoicing. But Philip was found at Azotus: and passing through he preached in all the cities, till he came to Cæsarea.*

I THINK we may gather a very useful lesson for ourselves from this teachableness of the Æthiopian nobleman, and from the answer which he returns to Philip's inquiry, "Understandest thou what

thou readest?" "How can I, except some man should guide me?" is the eunuch's reply, and he then requested the stranger to take his seat by his side in the chariot, and expound the Word of God to him. Is, then, man's teaching to supersede God's Word? or is that Word so dark and mysterious, so perplexed and unintelligible, that without human exposition it is only as a dead letter? That cannot be, for the Psalmist speaks of that Word as a lamp unto his feet and a light unto his path; and declares, moreover, of himself that he has more understanding than his teachers, and that because God's Word had been his study. And of this I am sure, that as he who reads it oftenest will love it most, so will he understand it best. I know no sight more interesting or more convincing of the Divine origin of that Word than to see, as one so often does, some lowly and perhaps aged one with the Bible open before him, reading its holy precepts and its loving promises in some interval of rest from daily toil, and then, like this student in the desert, rising up and going on his way rejoicing—finding the very same Word which so enlightened David, and so brightened the pathway of this traveller in the desert-road to Gaza, still shedding the same undimmed and cheering light over the well-worn Bible of some pilgrim of life's desert even now. No doubt there are parts of Scripture which at first are very dark and perplexing—"the

natural man understandeth not the things of God, neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned": and the Lord in his loving-kindness is ever ready to send some willing Philip, ready, nay glad, to join himself to every sincere inquirer, walk with him side by side, and give him to drink of the same fountain of living waters which has relieved his own thirst and refreshed his own soul.

I wonder not that this traveller understood not the passage he was reading, for the vail is still on the heart of every Jew that reads it; and he, too, even at this day, needs far more than human expositor or earthly teacher to convince him that it speaks of Jesus; he, too, has yet to learn that He that should come has come, and that he has no need to look for another.

It is impossible not to be struck with the simple but comprehensive brevity of the text on which Philip preached to this wayfaring man, whom he had thus met with by the way, "He preached unto him JESUS:" and were every text of every sermon but to preach Jesus, it would but fulfil the great end of all preaching, for no other foundation can any man lay than that is laid,—even the name of Jesus. And into what a softened and awakened heart, on what a prepared soil did the seed now sown fall!—as the Psalmist describes it, "like rain on the mown grass" or "as rivers on a dry ground." And here let me just say

to you, whoever "preaches Jesus" to you, be he who he may,—a wayside traveller who casually joins you on a journey, or an ordained minister from his pulpit—in gown and cassock, or in every day garb—one who takes his stand in the open street, or on his errand of mercy seeks out the wanderer and the ignorant in their own homes —be he Sadducee or Pharisee, Churchman or Dissenter—if he preach Jesus—if Jesus be his only theme, his Alpha and Omega, a full and free Gospel—then I say, "esteem that man very highly in love for his work's sake." I read not here that this nobleman ever questioned Philip as to who or what he was—Sadducee or Pharisee, Herodian or Nazarene—he "preached unto him Jesus," and that was at once the pledge of the preacher's truth, and a passport to his hearer's heart. But let me add, also, if he preach *not* Jesus—if he exalt any other name above that of Jesus, any other instrument or ordinance in the place of Jesus—then I say, though he should speak with the tongue of men and angels, nay though he were an angel from heaven, his preaching is only as sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal—it profiteth you nothing.

There can be little doubt from the narrative that Philip had in the course of his "preaching" spoken of the ordinance of baptism—of that last injunction of his Lord to go and baptize in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and

of the Holy Ghost. And, lo! again, how all was made ready and prepared!—"See, here is water." How true it is that when the Lord beginneth a good work, He will bring it to a perfect end! "All things are ready"—"here is water"—"what doth hinder me to be baptized?" "If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest." "He that believeth and is baptized," said Jesus, "shall be saved," and then comes that noble confession of his faith, "I believe that Jesus Christ"—that Jesus whom thou hast preached unto me—"is the Son of God." "And he baptized him."

The work was now done—the missionary's errand accomplished—God's purpose of mercy fulfilled—another name written in the Lamb's book of life—and the human instrument was needed no more. Of the future life of this pilgrim of the desert we know nothing, but that "he went on his way rejoicing"—no doubt "rejoicing" till the close of life, aye, and throughout eternity, in the knowledge of Christ Jesus his Saviour and his God. His voice has long been silent on the earth, ages on ages have passed away, generation after generation have entered into their graves, and his body is still mouldering in the dust, but we cannot doubt that his spirit has returned to God who gave it, and amid the unnumbered numbers of the Lord's redeemed

ones is now swelling the songs of praise to that Jesus who had sought and found him.

There, too, has the guide of his way, the holy Philip, joined his convert, and both he who taught and he who learned are now once more met together in that realm where they shall be no more parted. On this earth, after that memorable day, they met no more—the preacher, who had taught, returned to other scenes and other labours in his Master's cause, for as they came forth from that stream, which had supplied the waters of baptism, "the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip, that the eunuch saw him no more."

SECTION XLII.

CHAP. IX. 1—2. *And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the High Priest, and desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem.*

IN our last reading we had the narrative of one traveller over the desert road that leadeth from Jerusalem to Gaza. It involved in it most important results to that traveller for time and for eternity; and probably far beyond himself

and his own eternal interests, to many more of whom we read and know nothing. One cannot doubt that he, too, like the healed demoniac of Gadara, as he went on his way rejoicing, would "go home to his friends and tell them how great things the Lord had done for him," how He had met him by the way, "and had had compassion on him."

In this chapter we have the narrative of another traveller on another journey: and I know of no journey on which human traveller ever set forth in which the Christian world, nay, the whole world, "Greek or Jew, circumcision or uncircumcision, Scythian or barbarian, bond or free," has ever had such abundant cause to be interested or to rejoice, as that on which this traveller is setting out; and yet to all human appearance his errand is persecution, cruelty, and wrong.

This traveller is that "young man Saul," who took so sad a part in the martyrdom of Stephen, "consenting unto his death," and in whose keeping were placed the garments of those who had laid them aside while they stoned their unresisting victim. We next find him, emboldened by his first act, still more embittered and furious against the Church, violating the sanctity of every home, and dragging both men and women, and possibly even children also, from their home, consigned them to the "tender mercies" of a

prison. And here we find him in still wider rage, procuring authority and credentials from the High Priest and Sanhedrim that he might go on this lengthened journey of nearly 150 miles from Jerusalem to Damascus, to find out whether there were any "of this way;" men or women he heeded not, so that he might wreak his rage against them, and bring them bound to Jerusalem, as evidence of his zeal for the law, and his hatred of the Nazarene. What an expressive word does Luke use here, "Yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter!" still unsated, and thirsting for more, like a blood-hound on its track, with its tongue out, panting on in the chase, or, as the Psalmist describes it, "belching out with its mouth, wandering up and down for meat, and grudging if it be not satisfied."

We know not the road he took: whichever route he chose, it must of necessity lead him through those parts of Galilee which that Nazarene had so lately trodden. As was said of another traveller's journey from Judea into Galilee, "he must needs pass through Samaria," so of this traveller from Jerusalem to Damascus, he must needs pass through Galilee. And yet to him Galilee had no associations of interest or reverence—the waters of the Sea of Tiberias were not so attractive in his sight as those "rivers of Damascus" to which he was hastening. Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum struck no responsive

chords in his bosom, or if his eye glanced for a moment on Nazareth, as it lay on its hill-side, it would only stir up fiercer hatred to its loathed name, and more eager speed to his destination.

Nor do we know the mode in which he travelled: tradition (perhaps but an artist's tradition) has generally grouped a cavalcade on horseback, though the mule or the ass was the more usual Jewish method; and in the last chapter the *arma*, or travelling chariot, was the mode adopted. It is not, however, of the slightest consequence. Saul was travelling not only with letters from the High Priest, but, we are expressly told, with attendants also—with the retinue befitting an accredited officer on an important errand.

It would be most deeply and intensely interesting, could we know the train of thought which occupied this Jewish Inquisitor on his eventful journey. One thing, indeed, we do know about him, that he was thoroughly in earnest in his work. There might have been, and most probably there was, much of pride,—pride of intellect and attainment, pride of race, pride of privilege, supercilious scorn of others,—but there was no half measure in his burning zeal for that law in which he had been so rigidly educated, no restraining scruple, no withholding supposition that he might, to use his master's words, "be found fighting against God." He threw himself, heart and soul, into the work of putting down the

religion of Jesus, as he himself tells us of this period of darkness, ignorance, and unbelief, and with reference to this very journey, that "he verily thought within himself that he ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth." And many years afterwards, when writing more confidentially and explicitly to his own son in the faith, he tells Timothy that "he obtained mercy because he did it ignorantly in unbelief."

It is an important question which meets us here; does ignorance excuse unbelief, does sincerity justify continuance in what is wrong, in sin? One thing is perfectly clear, ignorance cannot change unbelief into belief, nor sincerity alter what is wrong into right; unbelief will continue unbelief, and wrong will remain wrong. And God's word emphatically declares of the sinner, even though unwarned, and though his blood will be required at the faithless watchman's hand, yet, dying in his sin, he will die an unforgiven and unpardoned soul: and our Lord himself, when on earth, sanctioned the same doctrine by declaring that the servant that knew not his Lord's will, and yet did things worthy of stripes, should be beaten, though with fewer stripes.

Yet the Lord is not straitened in his mercy; He who changed the heart of a Manasseh, He who saved a dying thief upon the cross, pulled

Paul also as a brand out of the fire, snatched him out of Satan's grasp, and for this cause, and this alone, he obtained mercy, "That in him first Jesus Christ might show forth all long-suffering, that he might be a pattern to all them that should hereafter believe on Him to life everlasting." It were a pernicious doctrine to hold out that sincerity justifies error, or can palliate persecution; if it were so, then is man true, and God a liar, who has declared of some that "He will send them a strong delusion that they should believe a lie, that they all might be damned, who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness." If this were so, then were Mahomet no impostor, and Torquemada *, no persecutor; and had not the mercy of God met Saul on his road to Damascus, he, too, might have lived and died, like Gamaliel, in the odour of Jewish sanctity, and been canonized as a Rabban † in the Jewish calendar; but he never would have been the admiration and the blessing of the whole Christian world.

* The Founder of the Spanish Inquisition.

† *Rabban* is the highest title of honour among Jewish doctors. Only seven have borne it, of whom Gamaliel was one.—*Vide Conybeare and Howson. Vol. I.*

SECTION XLIII.

CHAP. IX. 3, 4. *And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven: and he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?*

"MAN proposes, but God disposes," was never more signally illustrated than in this journey to Damascus. We have seen what man's purpose was, and now we read how the Lord disposed of that purpose: but, oh! how unspeakable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out! For many a day, as he journeyed onwards, the persecutor's purpose remained unaltered—as I have before said, the consecrated ground over which he passed, hallowed by the footsteps of the Redeemer, awakened no associations of sympathy or love in his heart. That city of Samaria, which had so lately rejoiced in the presence and preaching of Philip and the apostles, delayed not his hastening steps: eager only to reach the scene of his power, he hastened onwards through the wilderness that girdled in Damascus, till at length, at noon-day, as he still journeyed, the Syrian capital, with its white buildings, its luxuriant gardens, and its clear streams, broke upon his sight. One knows not how this scene of beauty, unparalleled even at the present day, may have attracted this traveller's

gaze, and for a moment have made him forget the purpose of his visit.

How different the feelings of those within the city who were the objects of his search! They seem to have learned by some means or other that the authorities at Jerusalem had commissioned an inquisitor to seek and to bind all that called on the name of Jesus, and that that inquisitor was Saul,—that name so known and dreaded, and whose cruelties to the saints at Jerusalem had long since reached their brethren at Damascus. And, no doubt, as they heard of the commission given to Saul, and his expected arrival, they had given themselves unto prayer. Noon-day was one of the stated Jewish periods of prayer, and one may well imagine that at the very time this dreaded foe was nearing the city walls, and all but entering within its gates, these anxious, and, it may be, timid disciples had met together at their wonted hour of prayer, and were praying that, if it were possible, this cup of persecution might pass from them.

The historian, indeed, does not mention this, nor do we read how, as on a former occasion, in a time of much peril, the disciples had met for prayer, and, "as they prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled, and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost." We read of no prophet of the Lord coming into the midst of the congregation, as in the days of old, saying unto

them, "Be not afraid, nor dismayed: ye shall not need to fight in this battle; stand ye still, and see the salvation of the Lord." (2 Chron. xx. 17.) And yet the Lord as miraculously and effectually fought for these poor disciples at Damascus, as when the sun stood still on Gibeon and the moon in the valley of Ajalon. It was, indeed, as if the sun had again stood still over the place where Saul was; or as if that predicted day had already come, when the light of the sun should be sevenfold as the light of seven days, in that noon-day hour when the Lord, in His unutterable mercy, not only closed the breach that was between the persecutor and his victims, but He Himself healed that persecutor's wound,

'And he who came to curse remained to pray.'

There is no incident in holy writ so strikingly and circumstantially narrated as this appearance of the Lord Jesus to Saul on his journey to Damascus. The very spot, the very hour, the very words spoken, the trembling astonishment of the horror-stricken and conscience-smitten persecutor, the speechless wonder of his attendants,—all are described with a minuteness of detail, and not only described once, but repeated twice afterwards (chaps. xxii. and xxvi.) with still more minute accuracy by the very person to whom all had occurred, and for whose conversion all had *been* prepared and intended, as if the Lord had

especially provided that cavil should find no ground to rest on, and that such an exhibition of the free and sovereign grace of God might remain as an eternal inheritance of consolation to the whole Christian world.

Difficulties have, indeed, been started, but they need perplex no one: the light that shone around the guilty one, and with its blaze of radiance cast him to the ground, as when in the garden of Gethsemane Jesus said to those who had come to take Him, 'I am He,' and they too fell to the ground, was equally and awfully visible to the others. And, though they saw no form, nor, indeed, heard any words, yet, perhaps, as when a voice from out of heaven declared that the Father had already glorified the Son's Name, and would glorify it again, the people that stood by were only conscious of some supernatural sound, and some said, 'It thundered,' while others thought that an angel's voice had spoken, yet none knew and none recognised the words,—so here the words were equally unheard and their purport unknown; and the communion between the Saviour and the sinner was confined to that sinner only.

Saul, however, saw no heavens opened, as his martyred victim had seen; he gazed on no Jesus standing at the right hand of God; and had such a vision been vouchsafed, he could have recognised no form he had known and loved on earth. But, though his sight was closed, his ear distinctly

heard the voice that spake those touching words, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me?" How true of the loving Jesus, here, that "He upbraideth not"! The words are no upbraiding, but rather the reproachful expostulation of a loving heart, which wonders that persecution and unkindness should be the return for all its love—"Why persecutest thou *Me?*" 'In all the afflictions of His people He is afflicted,' and 'whoso toucheth them toucheth the apple of His eye.' Oh! what a restraining motive from all unkindness and wrong to the Lord's people, "Your unkindness is not against them, but against Jesus." I have often thought what a strong expression that is which I have read somewhere, "I cannot come at my lust, but I must pass over my bleeding Saviour."

SECTION XLIV.

CHAP. IX. 5—9. *And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks. And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do. And the men which journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice, but seeing no man. And Saul arose from the earth; and when his eyes were opened, he saw no man: but they led him by the hand, and brought him into Damascus. And*

he was three days without sight, and neither did eat nor drink.

We find from the 26th chapter that this address to Saul was spoken by Jesus in the Hebrew tongue, and there not only seems a peculiar fitness, but a most expressive and touching tenderness in adopting that language which He Himself had spoken when on earth. It was the language, too, in which, in all probability, He had in times past spoken unto their fathers, Abraham and Isaac and Jacob: it was the language in which the law had been written, in which David had sung, and the prophets had spoken, and was, therefore, identified with all the associations of Israelitish memory and devotion, of holy hope and glorious promise.

I know not the language of heaven, nor in what tongue the spirits of just men made perfect hymn those holy songs of Moses and the Lamb, the very words of which the Holy Spirit has placed on record that we might, as it were, learn them beforehand, and in some degree carry the occupation and the language of earth's praises even into the courts of the Lord's house in heaven—but, though I would build nothing on the fact, I love to recognise, in this address of Jesus, one out of heaven speaking the language that had been familiar and endeared to Him when on earth.

I have before said that Saul had no knowledge of Jesus in the flesh—that, till this memorable

noon-day at the entrance of Damascus, his eyes had never seen the human form, nor his ears heard the voice, of Jesus. Eight times after His resurrection had the Saviour appeared to His disciples and others—once, too, after His ascension had the heavens opened, and He had shown Himself to the gladdened gaze of the martyr Stephen in His own appointed place at the right hand of God: and now, last of all, He was seen of Saul as of one born out of due time. From that day and hour those heavens have been closed to mortal vision—no human eye has been permitted to pierce the veil which shrouds the Infinite,* and those heavens will continue to receive Him till the appointed time of the restitution of all things, when once more every eye shall see Him, and look on Him whom they pierced.

It has been asserted, and certainly the narrative has nothing to contradict the supposition, that Saul saw no bodily form any more than the others with him; but *the words* of Jesus reached him with unerring distinctness, and how carefully he treasured them up, how indelibly they were graven on his memory, and with what tenacious accuracy

* It may be said that the account in the Apostle's Second Epistle to the Corinthians (chap. xii.) militates against the assertion in the text. But, as Paul there speaks of "visions," it may be conjectured that the revelation of the unutterable mysteries of that third heaven was vouchsafed in the manner implied by the word used.

he pondered over every syllable, we have undoubted proof in his own repetition of the scene when pleading before King Agrippa. Even in the abbreviated narrative here given by Luke, the whole scene is exquisitely touching. "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me?" had been the first appeal. Was it, could it be, his victim Stephen who was permitted to arrest his steps hastening on a similar errand of persecution—as Herod, in his terror, said, "This is John, whom I have beheaded"? Was it any one of those many outraged ones whom he had consigned to prison, and who might have pined and died there, and was now sent forth, a disembodied spirit, to confront the persecutor? Or could it be the Omnipotent Himself that thus thundered in the heavens, or the Highest that gave forth His voice, that thus shot forth His lightnings, and discomfited him? "Who art Thou, Lord?" was the humbled, conscience-smitten inquiry of the once proud Pharisee.

And oh! how sharper than any two-edged sword—how piercing, even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, must the answer have been! "I am Jesus whom thou persecutest"—or, as Paul with more faithful accuracy retains it, "I am Jesus the Nazarene,* whom thou persecutest." Oh! title of obloquy, dishonour, and shame, yet carried up into heaven, and borne by Him who is King of

* ὁ Ναζωραῖος.

kings, and Lord of lords. I know of no expression so touching, so full of tenderest reproach and yet of unutterable human sympathy—that stirs up such a train of thoughts and feelings as this simple answer, "I am Jesus the Nazarene,"—unless it be that one of the Prophet's (Zech. xiii. 6), "What are these wounds in thine hands?" "They are those with which I was wounded in the house of my friends."

One wonders not that the stony heart of this fierce Pharisee and zealot was at once subdued: he might have said with the Prophet (Isa. xxi. 3), "I was bowed down at the hearing of it; I was dismayed at the seeing of it; my heart panted." "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" was the answer of the now humbled and contrite man. "Thou, Jesus—the Nazarene—whom I have so persecuted—wilt Thou employ *me* to do aught for *Thee?*—me, Saul, who am at this moment bearing about me the warrants of those in authority for still greater persecution of those that bear Thy Name—what wilt Thou have me to do?"

One recalls to mind how, some centuries before, a great man had gone out *from* Damascus, with his chariots and horses and retinue of servants, and, though a leper, yet haughty and arrogant in bearing, and, in his pride, disdaining the simple cure that was offered him—yet even of him how soon was it added, when brought to his right mind, that his flesh came again as a little child!

And so now, one as haughty and arrogant as Naaman, as spiritually unclean and full of leprosy as that Syrian captain left it, is entering *into* Damascus—and, lo! the stony heart is taken out of his flesh, and a heart of flesh put within, and he, too, becomes as a little child.

SECTION XLV.

CHAP. IX. 10—16. *And there was a certain disciple at Damascus, named Ananias; and to him said the Lord in a vision, Ananias. And he said, Behold, I am here, Lord. And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the street which is called Straight, and enquire in the house of Judas for one called Saul, of Tarsus: for, behold he prayeth, and hath seen in a vision a man named Ananias coming in, and putting his hand on him, that he might receive his sight. Then Ananias answered, Lord, I have heard by many of this man, how much evil he hath done to thy saints at Jerusalem: and here he hath authority from the chief priests to bind all that call on thy name. But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel: for I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake.*

WE have already had an instance in the preceding chapter how the Lord ever has His instrument prepared and ready for the emergency to which He sends him. Whether it be to a traveller on a lonely and desert road, as in the last chapter, still

there is the ready and the willing Philip; or, as here, in the populous and crowded haunts of the Syrian capital, the human instrument is still at hand for the Lord's work—I do not think, however, we can add, in the present instance, as ready as the other messenger, for Ananias at the first seems to have shrunk from the commission given him, and would fain, for a moment at least, have remonstrated with Him that sent him, and declined the errand. But, oh! how shortsighted is man in God's work! how apt to stumble on the dark mountains of difficulty and unbelief! Moses would have evaded God's commission, "Who am I, that I should go unto Pharaoh?" It was the same with Jeremiah, "Ah, Lord God! behold, I cannot speak: for I am a child." It is not every one who has Samuel's grace to answer, "Speak, Lord; for Thy servant heareth;" and I am afraid that Ananias, too, would have been gladly spared his errand at the first: and yet how, from that hour to this, has the name of Ananias been associated in Christian annals with the history of St. Paul's conversion! Wheresoever in the whole world the Acts of the Apostles have been read, there has that which Ananias did been recorded and read also as a memorial of him. Could Ananias have foreseen or known the future eminence or usefulness of the man he now dreaded as a persecutor, with what instant readiness and grateful zeal would he have exclaimed, with the Prophet of

old, "Here am I, send me!" (Isa. vi. 8.) "It is good," says this very Apostle, "to be zealously affected always in a good thing;" and if we are sure that we are in the Lord's appointed path of duty, however difficulties may hinder, and dangers deter, and obstacles arise, He will make our way plain. "Who art thou, O great mountain? before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain."

Ananias was, perhaps, the more inexcusable in his timidity, as the Lord, in His condescension, so minutely detailed every incident for his encouragement. When the Spirit sent Philip on his message, that message simply was, "Arise, and go toward the south," and "he arose and went." But here the very street, the very house, and the name of the owner of the house, the name, too, of the person to be inquired for, the very employment in which he was at the moment occupied, so full of encouragement, so calculated to disarm every fear, and open every avenue of a brother's heart—"Behold, he prayeth!" Who could doubt, who could distrust one, who in his solitary chamber, in his blindness and mental anguish, was humbly praying to God for guidance and direction? And not only that—but still more to assure His messenger that He has already vouchsafed an answer to that prayer, and that, while He was bidding Ananias to arise and go to Saul, He had in that very chamber in vision revealed to Saul the

name, the errand, the very purpose and mode of mercy on which Ananias was to come.

As one reads such glimpses of the Lord's tenderness, what minute apparatus and machinery of love He provides and sets in motion for the recovery even of one sinner's soul, with what almost human accuracy of detail He guards against every contingency of failure or mistake—"Go to the street called Straight—find out the house of Judas—inquire for one Saul—Saul of Tarsus," one seems to enter more fully into the sweetness of that assurance that the very hairs of our head are all numbered. And I think, too, if our eyes were opened like the Prophet's servant in Dothan, we, too, should see somewhat of that wondrous machinery of defence, and provision of mercy, with which the Lord encourages each one of his children; how round about every one that feareth the Lord, His angel encampeth to ward off every peril, and is charged to keep him in all his ways. But our eyes are holden now—we see through a glass darkly; and so a weakened and timid faith too often walketh in darkness, and knoweth not whither it goeth.

But now all things were again ready—the soil prepared, the seed ready, the sower sent forth to sow, and we may truly say of the harvest of that day's sowing, that it is not yet fully gathered in. God's garners have been ever plenteously stored

with fruits of Paul's planting, and of which through every generation God has given the abundant increase; and even now there is room for more. Though dead, Paul still speaketh; for eighteen hundred years God has preserved the writings of that "chosen vessel," whom He so mercifully met with by the way on his journey to Damascus, as the blessed heir-loom and inheritance of his Church even to the end of time.

And yet, humanly speaking, it was no service of honour or of ease to which Saul was called: it is the distinctive feature of Christ's religion that every follower of the Lord is told that there is a cross appointed for him to bear, and that he must be prepared for every sacrifice, even of the nearest and the dearest, for his Master's sake. Nor was Saul exempted; he, too, was shown from the very beginning, ere he entered on the service, "what great things he must suffer for the name of Christ." We have in after years a very accurate, and the world, perhaps, would say a very melancholy detail of these sufferings (2 Cor. xi. 23), but we have also his deliberate computation and reckoning up of all that he had surrendered and lost and suffered with what he had gained; and without a moment's hesitation he declared the balance was, through the unsearchable riches of Christ, altogether and entirely in his favour; that he counted everything else but dung in comparison with the excellency of the knowledge of

Christ Jesus his Lord. There is a simplicity and distinctness in Paul's arithmetic which none can mistake. A plainer sum was never put down in figures—

LOSS—ALL THINGS. GAIN—CHRIST.

SECTION XLVI.

CHAP. IX. 17—18. *And Ananias went his way, and entered into the house: and putting his hands on him, said, Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost. And immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales, and he received sight forthwith, and arose, and was baptized.*

WHATEVER might have been the backwardness of Ananias at the first, one cannot but acknowledge with what earnest zeal and affectionate good-will he threw himself into the work given him to do. Having put his hand to the plough, he looked not back, but at once proceeded to the street and the house which had been named, and there entering in, for the first time beheld the dreaded persecutor, whose commission it was to seize himself and his fellow-disciples, and drag them bound to Jerusalem. How different the scene from that which Saul himself had once contemplated was

this first interview with the first Christian in Damascus! It reminds one, in some degree, of that after interview of the Apostle himself with Felix, when the Judge trembled and was abased before his prisoner.

But how full of love and tenderness and forgiveness was the salutation here! "*Brother* Saul"—a brother beloved in the Lord—a brother in the closest ties of Christian fellowship and endearment! How must every word spoken by this messenger of Jesus have struck upon the ear and heart of the listener! "The Lord, even Jesus, who appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me." Far beyond the credentials and commission of High Priest or Sanhedrim, the lowly disciple comes in the name of Jesus of Nazareth, lays his hands upon him, and, as he uttered the name of Him that sent him, recalls the scene which three days before had struck the persecutor to the ground. Ananias had not been present,—he had not witnessed the scene,—he had not heard the words,—and yet, as Saul must have reasoned within himself, by immediate revelation from heaven he knows it all, welcomes the persecutor as a brother, and declares the purpose of God's mercy, that having begun a good work in him, He was both able and willing to bring it to a perfect end in the gift of the Holy Ghost.

And as the first-fruits of that forgiving love, as

a pledge and foretaste of the great things still to be wrought in him, and as an emblem of that spiritual light which was to be poured in upon his darkened soul, the film, with which his bodily eyes had been shrouded, was at once miraculously removed. As Luke, himself a physician, records the fact, there fell from his eyes, as it had been scales: and the first sight that must have met his restored vision would be the features of him who was bending over him with such unutterable sympathy and love. And Saul indeed himself, in after years, when telling the story of his conversion and recovery of sight, adds, as if the scene was still vividly before his eyes, "The same hour I looked up upon him."

It was, no doubt, from the same hands that Saul received the rite of baptism; and now, as far as the human agency was concerned, all was accomplished that the Lord had purposed, and Ananias is not again mentioned. From the hour of that interview in Saul's darkened chamber in that street of Damascus called "Straight," we hear no more of him; he had finished the work which God had given to do, and whether he lived to hear of the labours and future eminence of the great Apostle of the Gentiles, of whose admission into the Church he had been the commissioned instrument, or whether he was soon withdrawn to his rest, we know not. If life were continued, *how* often must he, too, have said of their mutual

course, as tidings upon tidings reached him of Paul's unwearied zeal and success in the ministry, "He must increase, but I must decrease;" and have "glorified God in him."

I cannot but think that the Lord intends us to derive much instruction and consolatory encouragement from such instances as this of Ananias. He might have said of himself, as was predicted of the Baptist, that he was but as a voice, "Nothing but a voice—a sound that as soon as it has expressed the thought of which it is the sign, dies into air, and is heard no more."* And of how many of the Lord's servants is the same representation true! Their voice is, indeed, heard in the humble and retired scenes amid which they dwell, their holiest and happiest labours in many a darkened chamber unknown to many, but not unknown to God. Is there no book of God's record in which their name and work is written? Yes, though utterly forgotten, and never entered in earth's annals, yet even to such an one, be he among the weak and the foolish, and the base, and those whom the world despises,—yet even to him is the promise true, "To him that overcometh I will not blot out his name out of the book of Life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before His angels."

And yet how strikingly does Paul pass by

* Fenélon.

every human instrument, and revert to the one Omnipotent agent of his conversion!—"Paul, an apostle, not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father." "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy Name" be ascribed the praise and the glory of every sinner saved!

SECTION XLVII.

CHAP. IX. 19—25. *And when he had received meat, he was strengthened. Then was Saul certain days with the disciples which were at Damascus. And straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God. But all that heard him were amazed, and said, Is not this he that destroyed them which called on this name in Jerusalem, and came hither for that intent, that he might bring them bound unto the chief priests? But Saul increased the more in strength, and confounded the Jews which dwelt at Damascus, proving that this is very Christ. And after that many days were fulfilled, the Jews took counsel to kill him; but their laying await was known of Saul; and they watched the gates day and night to kill him. Then the disciples took him by night and let him down by the wall in a basket.*

ST. PAUL'S own account in his Epistle to the Galatians throws some little additional light on this early portion of the Apostle's converted life: but there is still some confusion in the narrative which we cannot altogether unravel. It does not indeed fall within the compass of these domestic

readings to attempt to ascertain with accuracy the exact chronology of the various incidents of the Apostle's life, nor would it be a profitable occupation of the short space allotted to us in them.

We learn here, that no sooner was Paul restored to his usual strength and activity, than he at once began the work given him to do; and he who had come to Damascus to persecute, now preached in her streets and synagogues that faith which once he destroyed. "Straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God." Paul tells the Galatians that he received his knowledge of the Gospel from no human teacher: "I neither received it of man," he says, "neither was I taught it, but by the (immediate) revelation of Jesus Christ." It was no preconceived theory of his own which he sought to bolster up by warped texts and distorted reasoning; it was no theory of man that he advocated or preached, no doctrine of earth sanctioned by lengthened tradition and continuous usage, no teaching of Scribes and Pharisees and doctors of the law,—those blind guides, which strained at a gnat and swallowed a camel. What Paul preached was taught him of God, by the revelation of Jesus Christ, and by the instruction of the Holy Ghost. What was it, then, that this preacher of righteousness, thus taught of God, thus instructed of the Holy Spirit, made the subject of his own early teaching in the synagogues of Damascus? It was

THE DIVINITY OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST: the same doctrine that the Evangelist John afterwards so strongly asserted, that "in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."

I cannot but think that there is great significancy in the prominency of this doctrine, and that we are hereby taught that no preaching which slurs over or evades, far less that which denies, which does not rest all on the Godhead of the Lord Jesus Christ, can avail to the salvation of any soul. But Saul did not stop here—having, like a wise master-builder, laid the foundation deep and strong in the eternal Godhead of the Son, he then proceeds to declare and to prove with irresistible argument that this Son of God was indeed God manifest in the flesh,—the very Christ, the Anointed of God, the Messiah—He that should come, the predicted of the prophets, Jesus of Nazareth, the crucified and slain, perfect God and perfect man! I can well believe that Saul, as he preached these glorious tidings, must have fully expected every prejudice of the Jewish heart to fall down before the resistless energy of truth, as the walls of Jericho fell flat before the blast of Israel's trumpets, or as the idol in the house of Dagon before the ark of God. His own undoubted conviction, and his earnestness in declaring that conviction,—the wisdom by which he spake, and, more than all, the astounding

change in his opinions and views, and the miraculous mode in which that change had been wrought, and which could not but be known to every dweller in Damascus,—all these things put together, he might well expect, would bring conviction to his hearers also.

But, alas! when men have long stopped their ears, and closed their eyes and hardened their hearts, so that, though hearing, they shall not understand, and, though seeing, they shall not perceive, then comes the fearful and yet righteous climax, that they are given over to a strong delusion to believe a lie. Saul remembered not his own hardness of heart and resistance of the truth, or perhaps thought that that very circumstance added greater weight and cogency to his arguments; but we are not surprised to find that the same unbelief which had caused the Jews and Saul himself to gnash and grind with their teeth at Stephen's preaching, even though, it is added, that it cut them to the heart, here led them to plot against the life of Saul also.

We find, indeed, from that letter to the Galatians to which I have already alluded, that some considerable interval had elapsed since that memorable day of Saul's entry into Damascus, and that he had, after a short time, retired into some neighbouring and more secluded district, there to commune with his own heart, and await the

Lord's time for the more regular commencement of his work; that at the close of that period of seclusion he returned again to Damascus, and found hearts even harder than before, still averse to truth, and more and more embittered against himself, so that his very life was in danger, and he was forced to quit Damascus, and return once more to Jerusalem. But how did he quit it? We know how he had intended to enter it three years before,—an accredited commissioner of the Sanhedrim, with all the pomp of retinue and the solemnity of judicial authority, men and women trembling at his approach. It is true he did not enter it in this lordly state, but was led by the hand, a poor trembling, blinded, smitten man; and now he was to quit it, himself a fugitive, his own life sought after, and his every step so beset, and every outlet so watched, that in order to effect his escape his friends contrived a means of descent from the window of a house that jutted over the city walls. And those friends were the very persons whose liberties he had himself come to violate, who had trembled at his approach, and now jeopardied their own lives in saving his!

SECTION XLVIII.

CHAP. IX. 26—30. *And when Saul was come to Jerusalem, he assayed to join himself to the disciples: but they were all afraid of him, and believed not that he was a disciple. But Barnabas took him, and brought him to the apostles, and declared unto them how he had seen the Lord in the way, and that he had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus. And he was with them coming in and going out at Jerusalem. And he spake boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus, and disputed against the Grecians: but they went about to slay him. Which when the brethren knew, they brought him down to Cesarea, and sent him forth to Tarsus.*

THREE years are supposed to have elapsed since Saul set forth from Jerusalem to Damascus on his errand of persecution, and since that eventful noon-day, when he was arrested by a power beyond that of High Priest or Sanhedrim, and the whole current and purpose of his life altered. Of those three important years—how they were spent, or even where they were spent—we know nothing with certainty. All that is told us is by Paul himself in his Epistle to the Galatians, in which he writes, that immediately, or almost immediately after that revelation of the Lord Jesus to him as he journeyed, "he conferred not with flesh and blood, but went into Arabia, and returned again unto Damascus, and then after

three years he went up to Jerusalem." It is with this journey we have now to do.

Many a striking contrast has been written, many a graphic sketch given both by historian and poet of the setting forth and the coming back of vast armaments and mighty conquerors. A Roman poet, on "The Vanity of Human Wishes," has condensed into few but forcible lines the striking difference, when a Persian monarch set forth with his countless troops and his mighty fleets for the conquest of Greece—but how did he return? his fleets shattered, his armies defeated—in a solitary vessel over the tempest-tossed sea.* We might recall to mind, too, the event in our own history of the Spanish Armada, or the return from Moscow in more recent times. But none of these events are at all parallel to this solitary return of the Apostle to Jerusalem. Xerxes, and Philip, and Napoleon, mighty, as they were in their generations, have all passed away, and though recorded and remembered in history, can scarcely be said to have left any traces for good even in their own land. But wherever Christianity has found its way,—in lands unknown to Xerxes, and not even discovered in Philip's days, and far beyond the conquests of

* Sed qualis rediit? nempe unâ nave cruentis
Fluctibus, ac tardâ per densa cadavera prorâ.
—*Juv., Sat. X.*

the great Napoleon, the name of Paul has found its way, and left its holy seal of truth on men's hearts and minds for time and for eternity,—and yet at the period of this return to Jerusalem, how improbable, how beyond all human supposition, would such a dream have been.

Three years before, we had seen this commissioned minister of the chief authorities of Judea setting forth from Jerusalem with his retinue of attendants, and, it may be, pomp of equipage. His route led him through scenes and districts which, from that hour to the present, have been the dearest to the Christian heart, the very names of which are familiar in our mouths as "household words," and which even in their present desolation recall associations and memories of the most sacred and thrilling character; and yet, as we have reason to believe, that traveller's eye glanced over all unheeding; his only thought, his sole desire, to crush, if it were possible, the very memory and name of Him, of whom they reminded him. And now he was returning—but how? I think there is much significance in the Holy Spirit's recording the very manner of Saul's departure, or escape from Damascus: "he was let down by night from the wall in a basket." We are apt to think it mean, degrading, unbecoming, and perhaps even savouring of cowardice in one who was to confront "Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel." No doubt it *was*

mean; and God chose the mean and the base, that no flesh should glory in his presence. Had any one with prophetic spirit—had any Agabus, when Saul was drawing nigh to Damascus, stood before him in the way, as the angel in the path of Balaam, and told him how he should leave its walls—he, too, would have said, "Am I a dog, or a thief, that this should happen unto me?" But the loftiness of man had been bowed down, and the haughtiness of man had been made low, and the Lord alone exalted in that memorable noon-day scene; and even in this early period, and in this very circumstance, we see the germ of that spirit, which in after years, when the Holy Ghost witnessed to him that in every city bonds and afflictions awaited him, led him to declare that none of these things moved him, neither counted he his life dear unto himself, so that he might finish his course with joy, and that he was ready even to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus. And every step he took, every district he traversed, every valley he passed through, as he skirted the sea of Galilee, and as he neared the holy city, encircled by its hills, what thousand thoughts and feelings would now crowd into his mind of the change that had been wrought in him since last he passed beneath its gates.

It is true he was a fugitive and an exile, an alien from his own people, and separated by a gulf

that never could be crossed from all with whom he had been previously associated. And would the brethren, to whom he had now joined himself, would they welcome him as a brother? He tells us that at this time he was unknown by face to every Church in Christ in Judea; and so slow, so interrupted, and full of hazard were communications at this period of internal dissension and commotion between the two capitals of Jerusalem and Damascus, that it would seem the Christians in Judea had received no clear nor distinct intelligence of the events that had occurred there, and that whatever of rumour had reached them had been discredited as too strange for truth. Still it must have been a painful trial to the new convert's heart to find himself an object of suspicion and fear to the one party, as he undoubtedly was of hatred and reviling to the other. It almost realized that painful period at Rome, when no man stood with him, but all forsook him. But, as then, the Lord was with him, and He never intended that this time of trial should last; and so, accordingly, we soon find Barnabas recognizing Saul, probably as an early acquaintance, and then, on finding the real state of the case, introducing him to James and Peter—the latter of whom offered Saul a home under his own roof during his short stay in Jerusalem.

His visit was, indeed, only for fifteen days,

but how characteristically did he employ that time, and, as he mourned over the result of these his efforts, with what saddened recollections must he have recalled that period of his own hardness of heart, when Stephen, too, spake as boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus, and disputed with the Grecians, and he himself went about to slay him. Stephen's work was soon ended; but Saul had many a year of labour and of peril to pass through, many a conflict to fight, and many a persecution to endure, ere his crown of victory was won. And, as at Damascus, so at Jerusalem, the Jews went about to slay him; and, receiving an intimation from the Holy Spirit, he withdrew and sought shelter for a season in the home and amid the scenes of his childhood at Tarsus.

SECTION XLIX.

CHAP. IX. 31—35. *Then had the churches rest throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied. And it came to pass as Peter passed throughout all quarters, he came down also to the saints which dwelt at Lydda. And there he found a certain man named Eneas, which had kept his bed eight years, and was sick of the palsy. And Peter said unto him, Eneas, Jesus Christ maketh thee whole: arise, and*

make thy bed. And he arose immediately. And all that dwelt at Lydda and Saron saw him, and turned to the Lord.

It was from no abated hostility, no diminished animosity against the disciples of Jesus that the Churches now had rest, and a brief cessation from persecution and outrage. It was something like the deliverance which the Lord had vouchsafed to Hezekiah, when Tirhakah king of Ethiopia came forth against Sennacherib, and forced him to mind his own affairs. So here the disturbances in Judea arising out of the oppressive edicts of the Roman emperor diverted the attention of the Jews to their own safety; and in this time of lull, we find not the rest only, but the increase and stability of the Churches established, so that He who stilleth the raging of the sea, and the noise of the waves, and the madness of the people, caused all these things to work together for the good of His Church.

It is a very striking and instructive expression which the historian here uses, how that "walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost they were multiplied." We see fear and comfort, godly fear, and godly comfort, inseparably united; and it is from not understanding or not remembering this, that so many miss the comfort they expect from religion, and then lay the blame on religion, as if it did not and could not realize its own promises. But

depend upon it, a careless walk never can be a happy one; and, in this sense, blessed is the man that feareth always. The fear of the Lord is not only the beginning of wisdom, but of happiness, and he who desires the comfort of the Holy Ghost will seek it in that appointed way in which alone it can be found. "The kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost;" and he who has set out in the fear of the Lord, and continues in it unto the end, will not only find it issue in all the comforts of the Holy Spirit, but in the increase and abundance of every Christian and holy grace.

The remainder of this chapter is occupied with two very touching and interesting incidents, not confined to one generation nor one clime alone, but in every age, in every country, in every household and family, sickness and death are ever found to enter. It is not at Lydda nor at Joppa only that friends and relatives have stood by the side of one who has kept his bed for many a weary year, and have mourned over the protracted sufferings of one they loved, but for whose relief they could devise no means; it is not at Joppa only that mourners have crowded in the chamber of a departed one, have talked to one another of the many virtues and excellencies of him or her they loved, and lingered on the theme, as unwilling to part

from it. No; we too have seen and known of scenes such as these which met Peter's eyes and awakened Peter's sympathy; and as we stood by the bed-side of the one to speak of comfort and peace, or have attempted in the first burst of grief to bid the mourners sorrow not as those without hope, it may be that a wish has glanced through the heart, that we too could do as Peter did, and in the name of Jesus Christ bid the cripple stand up, and the dead arise.

And yet, though silver and gold have we none, though we cannot dispense healing, nor bid disease and death depart at our word, yet such as we have, such as the Lord puts into our hands, give we unto them; and in the same name of Jesus can bid the sufferer look to Him, who in his own hour of suffering, said, "The cup that my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?" and in the words of the same loving Jesus can say to every mourner, "Thy brother, thy sister, shall rise again."

It was a long period that this poor palsied one had kept his bed, eight years, and yet we read of one whose infirmity had lasted for thirty and eight years; and one is perhaps tempted to ask for what end and purpose such lengthened sufferings are designed; why one, it may be, is selected as it were out of a joyous and happy circle, and wearisome days and nights are appointed unto one sick chamber, while joy and gladness

and health are in the rest of the dwelling, and the inmates can go hither and thither as the mood takes them, while the suffering one remains a prisoner to that weary couch. And I fear, too, though I could hardly wonder, that not only desponding and joyless thoughts, but complaining ones also at times have the mastery in the sufferer's heart, "Why art thou cast down, O my soul, and why art thou disquieted within me?"

It is enough for faith to rest on that word of consolation and of truth: "whom the Lord loveth, He chasteneth," and to know therefore that love is the chief ingredient in the dispensation. I do not think it altogether meets such a sufferer's case to say, "It is the Lord, let Him do what seemeth him good;" that rather meets a case of punishment, of righteous retribution, such as when Aaron was still and opened not his mouth, for it was the Lord's doing. But what the sufferer wants, is to see "a needs-be" in his season of tribulation, to rejoice in the Lord and have songs in the night season of sorrow, and if he cannot at first attain unto that, to trust in the Lord though He slay him, and so to be made more than conqueror through Him that loveth him. What he wants is not merely tribulation working patience, but patience experience, and experience hope, and that a hope that maketh not ashamed, because the love *of* God is shed abroad in his heart by the Holy

Ghost which is given unto him; and he therefore sees and reads love inscribed on each day's cross of suffering, and acknowledges that there has not been one trial too many nor one pain too severe, and so calmly waits all the days of his appointed time, till his change come.

SECTION L.

CHAP. IX. 36—43. *Now there was at Joppa a certain disciple named Tabitha, which by interpretation is called Dorcas: this woman was full of good works and alms-deeds which she did. And it came to pass in those days, that she was sick, and died; whom when they had washed, they laid her in an upper chamber. And forasmuch as Lydda was nigh to Joppa, and the disciples had heard that Peter was there, they sent unto him two men, desiring him that he would not delay to come to them. Then Peter arose and went with them. When he was come, they brought him into the upper chamber: and all the widows stood by him weeping, and shewing the coats and garments which Dorcas made while she was with them. But Peter put them all forth, and kneeled down, and prayed; and turning him to the body said, Tabitha, arise. And she opened her eyes: and when she saw Peter, she sat up. And he gave her his hand, and lifted her up, and when he had called the saints and widows, he presented her alive. And it was known throughout all Joppa; and many believed in the Lord. And it came to pass, that he tarried many days in Joppa with one Simon a tanner.*

THERE are still some instructive and valuable

lessons to be gathered up from this lowly narrative of Dorcas. As we read of Saul, and see heaven and earth, as it were, taking part in his conversion, and think of the wondrous purposes of love and mercy to the whole world to the very end of time involved in that one scene which we have been so lately contemplating on the Damascus road and in that darkened chamber in the house of Judas—deeply as we ourselves are interested in that event, and greatly as we adore and praise the God of mercy for that revelation of himself—we yet feel that it is so far removed from the ordinary ways and methods of the Lord's dealings with man that we can hardly realize it as coming home to ourselves.

The present narrative, however, is altogether of a domestic character, belonging to no age, nor country; and, in one portion of its incidents at least, occurring in our own day and our own land, as it did in that seaport town of Palestine. It is the simple story of a widow woman, who in those days was sick and died. There were no doubt many widows in Israel, many, it may be, as humble-minded, as pious, as full of kindness as this widow of Joppa, and they, too, each in their turn sickened and died; but to none of them was an apostle sent with the life-giving word "Arise."

It is, however, more to the character of Dorcas during her life-time that I would draw your

attention; and how very natural and full of interest is the description here, incidentally as it were, let fall by Luke in the account given of the loss experienced and the sorrow felt at her death. And yet I think we may gather from the story that Dorcas was not rich in this world's goods, though assuredly not in the destitute condition of the widow of Sarepta, when the prophet was consigned to her care. Dorcas might, perhaps, have said to the poor around her, "Silver and gold have I none;" and had she stayed there, had she rested satisfied with that barrier, which fortune had apparently placed in the way of charity, we might not indeed have blamed her, but she would not have obtained that niche in God's Word, which she now occupies. And it is in this point that her character is not only so deserving, but so capable of imitation—"such as she had she gave" unto those that needed. What then were her means—her implements of usefulness, the quiet, unobtrusive, unostentatious method of her industry and kindness? Her own hands were her means, a needle and thread her implements, and her own home, her own humble chamber, the scene of her industry! And it is just this, which the Holy Spirit has deigned to leave on record, on which God has affixed the seal of his own approval, and which the loving Jesus has accepted as done in his name. And who is there of all God's family, even

the poorest, that has not the same or similar means within their reach? Who is there that, if there be first a willing mind, has not within their compass opportunities as abundant as fell to the lot of Dorcas in this little shipping town of Joppa?

And there is something very affecting in the scene presented to us in that upper chamber. Most of us, perhaps, have been present in a chamber of death, and witnessed that scene of sorrow, the stifled sob, the gushing tears, the clasped hands, the uplifted eyes. But it was not so here—we do not read of bereaved children or mourning relatives,—probably she was a childless widow—but still there were bereaved ones, widows like herself, who had gathered together in that chamber, and, as they gazed upon their benefactress alike unconscious of their presence and their grief, were recounting one to another all her acts of kindness, and it may be that some had brought with them the latest tokens of her good-will as evidence of the loving spirit that had once dwelt within that lifeless tenement.

And are not these legitimate topics of affectionate remembrance to survivors—do we not all love to recall and dwell on the various acts of beneficence and goodness that have marked the earthly course of those we have loved and lost; do we not treasure up in our hearts' deepest nook the last token, nay, the last word, the last look of

kindness, which shed its passing ray over the dying features of relative or friend? And though we know that in themselves they are worthless as a title to God's favour, and though the disembodied spirit not merely would reject all, but would ask in wonder and surprise, as the enumeration met their ears, "Lord! when did we these things unto Thee?" yet still the gracious approval remains on record—"Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me." And amid the annals of heaven are still written the cup of cold water to a prophet, the widow's two mites cast into the Lord's treasury, and the coats and the garments which Dorcas made for the Lord's poor at Joppa.

SECTION LI.

CHAP. X. 1—2. *There was a certain man in Cæsarea called Cornelius, a centurion of the band called the Italian band, a devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God alway.*

WE have now reached that chapter of the apostolic annals, in which we ourselves are the most deeply interested, for it records the admission of the first Gentile convert into the Christian

Church—the breaking down of that barrier wall between Jew and Gentile, which was prefigured by the rending in twain of the temple at the crucifixion of Jesus, and through which, as into a beleaguered city of which the walls were thrown down, the Gentiles were henceforth to rush in, and flock as doves to the windows.

But a singularity meets us at the very outset on which I would just say a few words; and it is that Paul was commissioned of God as the apostle of the uncircumcision or Gentiles, as Peter was more immediately set apart as the apostle of the Circumcision or Jews; and yet to Peter is assigned by especial revelation the office and honourable distinction of admitting the first Gentile convert. I do not, however, see anywhere that Peter's commission or that of any of the apostles was confined to the Jewish Church; on the contrary, their charter ran in the broad and comprehensive words: "Go ye into *all the world* and preach the Gospel to *every creature;*" and I think we may see much wisdom in the appointment which assigned to Peter rather than to Paul this first most significant and important step.

Assuredly, even at this period, Peter was but very imperfectly acquainted with the Divine will upon this point; the free and equal admission of Jew and Gentile into Christian privileges was hardly yet recognized by any of the apostolic

band; far less the overleaping and passing by of Jewish ordinances and Jewish rites as preparatory and essential—that had never entered into the mind or imagination of any Jew. Had Saul, then, at his own first conversion, been the instrument in this work, had he commenced his more public ministry by thus openly avowing and carrying into effect a measure so repugnant and alien to every Jewish feeling and opinion, he would in all probability have excited a still greater outburst of suspicion and aversion and dread, and greater obstacles would have been thrown in the way of his future usefulness as a preacher even to the Gentiles. We read in the next chapter that even Peter was censured by his brethren for "eating with uncircumcised men;" nor was it till he had explained all the circumstances of the case, that they "held their peace," and recognized God's will and purpose "in granting repentance unto life, even to the Gentiles also." And thus while the Lord had withdrawn Saul to Tarsus for a little season previous to sending him forth on his own peculiar mission, we find Him graciously preparing the way by making Peter himself the instrument in breaking down the wall of partition which had hitherto kept asunder the two great branches of the Lord's human family, but which were now henceforth to be made one in Christ.

Of Cornelius himself we know nothing more

than is recorded in this chapter. It has been suggested that he possibly was the centurion who was so impressed with the incidents of the Saviour's crucifixion that he exclaimed, "Truly, this was the Son of God." I see no grounds for such a supposition, save the similarity of the rank he held, and the favourable sentiments he felt and expressed for Jesus; and that would apply as forcibly to the centurion at Capernaum, whose servant Jesus had healed. There can be no doubt, however, that he was an officer of rank, and, as his name implies, of high patrician family; but far beyond the genealogies of earth, or the distinctions of rank, he is here more honourably recorded in God's Word as "One that feared God with all his house, a man of prayer and much alms." Of all that Italian band not one other name is mentioned. We know nothing of the whole hundred beyond their commander and one other. Save that one event, which is recorded in the fifth chapter of Genesis of the progenitors of Noah—"he died"—so of each one of this Italian band we only know that he too died. One name alone upon the muster-roll remains, and that, not because he was an officer of rank in Herod's royal city of Cesarea, nor because he was a scion of the noble "Cornelian house," but because he feared God, and was the chosen vanguard of the Gentile Christian Church.

We must remember, however, that when the

historian declares he feared God, he does not mean the gods of heathen mythology; he means not Jupiter, nor Mars, nor Apollo, nor the many deities of Rome's calendar; he means the one true God, Jehovah. A celebrated poet of our own, in his "Universal Prayer" has written

"Jehovah, Jove, or Lord,"

as if there were little or no difference between the God of the Bible and the fabled Jove of Heathendom; and as if he would have us pin our faith on those two still more senseless lines of his,

"For modes of faith let senseless bigots fight;
He can't be wrong, whose life is in the right."

This tenth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles cuts the very ground from beneath such an assertion, and bids it fall and crumble into dust and nothingness. Here is Cornelius, a man of irreproachable character and conduct, righteous before God, and leading his household to walk in the same course with himself, a man of prayer and abundant in charity, upright and blameless in all his ways. And yet he had not attained to eternal life, and God wrought especial miracles, and sent especial messengers and revelations in order that he might be taught the way. It was almost the last prayer of Jesus on earth to his Father that He would give eternal life to as many as the Father had given him, and then He adds, "And this is life eternal, that they might know Thee,

the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent. Yes! natural religion has received its death-blow in this character and conversion of Cornelius; an irreproachable and blameless character, however lovely in the eyes of men, is found wanting when weighed in the Lord's balance. The eternal truth remains unaltered in one jot or tittle, "I am," saith Jesus, "the Way, the Truth, and the Life: no man cometh unto the Father, *but by Me.*"

SECTION LII.

CHAP. X. 3—8. *He saw in a vision evidently about the ninth hour of the day an angel of God coming in to him, and saying unto him, Cornelius. And when he looked on him, he was afraid, and said, What is it, Lord? And he said unto him, Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God. And now send men to Joppa, and call for one Simon, whose surname is Peter: He lodgeth with one Simon a tanner, whose house is by the sea side: he shall tell thee what thou oughtest to do. And when the angel which spake unto Cornelius was departed, he called two of his household servants, and a devout soldier of them that waited on him continually: And when he had declared all these things unto them, he sent them to Joppa.*

WE have here another very striking evidence of the honour the Lord puts upon missionary work, perhaps more striking than in the former case of

Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch. A heavenly messenger, "an angel of God," is sent forth on an errand of mercy to the house of this centurion. It was no distempered vision of an enthusiast or fanatic, whose imagination had been excited, and his mind weakened by lengthened fasting and prayer; nor, perhaps, can one imagine a more unlikely subject of such a delusion than a Roman officer. The Holy Spirit, however, for wise purposes, has left no room for cavil. Cornelius "evidently saw," as distinctly as the women at the sepulchre both saw and heard the angel there, and audibly heard his actual words.

And what was the purport of this heavenly visit? What was the message and the saving truth on which a messenger from the courts of heaven was despatched in answer to prayer? Long after this period an endeared associate and companion of Peter describes himself as seeing "'in vision' another angel flying in the midst of heaven, and *he* had in his hand the everlasting Gospel to preach to all that do dwell in the earth:" but this angel had no such commission; he had no Gospel himself to preach, no Jesus to announce; his simple message was, "Send for the missionary,"—"Send men to Joppa to call for Simon, whose surname is Peter: he shall tell thee what thou oughtest to do."

There is, however, another instructive lesson which I think we may gather from this address of

the angel to Cornelius. I do not mean that encouraging assurance which tells us that our prayers, and our alms too, go up as a memorial before God; that not one is forgotten, not one overlooked—the cup of cold water, the very tears that washed the Saviour's feet, the little cake of meal surrendered to the prophet's use—nor even the feeblest prayer of faith, such as Peter himself once uttered, "Lord, save me!"—all are recorded and entered as memorials, and preserved in those "golden vials full of odours, which are the prayers of saints." And there is much encouragement in this assurance of the angel to Cornelius, that his alms and prayers had gone up and been remembered in heaven.

But this is not the point to which I would draw your attention—it is to the simple testimony which this passage affords, with so many others, that our names, our earthly names, as well as our prayers and alms, are all written in heaven; and that those "ministering spirits sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation" disdain not to recognise and to adopt those distinctions of name by which man is known to man. "Cornelius," is the simple salutation of the angel to him to whom he was sent. And not merely is the name of Cornelius known, but his also for whom he was to send, "Simon," 'whose surname,' too, the name given by Jesus, was so touchingly added—"Simon, whose surname is Peter;" and,

as in the preceding chapter, the very name of the person with whom he was lodging—"he lodgeth with one Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the sea-side." Saul was by trade a tentmaker, Peter a fisherman, and Simon is here mentioned as a tanner: but a tanner's occupation, for what cause I know not, was looked upon as the lowest and perhaps the most degraded occupation of all. And yet an angel from heaven disdains not to point out the name and trade and the very house of a despised tanner! I love to trace out these coincidences of holy writ, which so unmistakeably and yet so lovingly evidence, that known unto God are all our ways, and that His eye marks the lowliest occupation of the humblest being, and the very spot where he dwells and toils. How little do *we* realize this! We pass, perhaps, some neglected tenement on a common—or some bleak home by the sea-side, where the fisherman spreads his nets —some wayside dwelling that tells but of poverty and obscurity—and we think not that the name of every inmate is known in heaven, and that their every movement and act is an object of interest and watchfulness to those spirits who are always beholding the face of their Father in heaven.

It was an honourable commendation, which God gave to Abraham, that he would command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord, as he himself had done, and we

see it very strikingly exemplified in the household of this pious centurion also, and that the unction of his holy example had descended and reached even to some of the soldiers whom he commanded. "A devout soldier"—rare as such a character might be in the Roman armies or in the cohorts of Cæsarea—is no anomaly in these our days; and our own annals testify that in every age God has not left himself without witness even in devout soldiers. And, as Cornelius is first and foremost in the van, so Great Britain has not been without its Colonel Gardiner in former days, nor its Hedley Vicars and its General Havelock in present times.

The messengers, then, whom Cornelius selected for this most important errand were two of his household servants, and "a devout soldier," no doubt of that Italian Band, but whose name the Holy Spirit has withheld. And how gladly must they have set forth on such a work, and with such credentials as God's own message by His angel! They disdained not the humble abode of him they sought, nor for a moment questioned the truth of that angel's words, that the missionary they were instructed to seek would indeed be the herald of glad tidings to their master's house.

SECTION LIII.

CHAP. X. 9—22. *On the morrow, as they went on their journey, and drew nigh unto the city, Peter went up upon the house-top to pray about the sixth hour. And he became very hungry, and would have eaten: but, while they made ready, he fell into a trance, and saw heaven opened, and a certain vessel descending unto him, as it had been a great sheet knit at the four corners, and let down to the earth; wherein were all manner of four-footed beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air. And there came a voice to him, Rise, Peter; kill, and eat. But Peter said, Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten any thing that is common or unclean. And the voice spake unto him again the second time, What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common. This was done thrice: and the vessel was received up again into heaven. Now, while Peter doubted in himself what this vision which he had seen should mean, behold, the men which were sent from Cornelius had made inquiry for Simon's house, and stood before the gate, and called, and asked whether Simon, which was surnamed Peter, were lodged there. While Peter thought on the vision, the Spirit said unto him, Behold, three men seek thee. Arise therefore, and get thee down, and go with them, doubting nothing: for I have sent them. Then Peter went down to the men which were sent unto him from Cornelius, and said, Behold, I am he whom ye seek: what is the cause wherefore ye are come? And they said, Cornelius the centurion, a just man, and one that feareth God, and of good report among all the nation of the Jews, was warned from God by an holy angel to send for thee into his house, and to hear words of thee.*

ONE of the sweetest truths revealed to us in the

Word of God is the doctrine of a special providence—an Almighty Being, full of love and power, watching over and providing for the especial necessities and peculiar cases of every child in His family. We can, indeed, see God in the wide world, ruling over all His works; "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament showeth His handy work;" we can hear His voice in the thunder, and see His majesty in the lightning that lighteneth from one end of heaven to the other. In every valley, on every mountain, and every hill, he that runs may read the traces of our God; but what we want to know for the comfort and support of our own weary and way-worn pilgrimage is, that this very God "who inhabiteth Eternity, and whose name is Holy, dwelleth also with him that is of a contrite and humble spirit," that He is able and ready "to revive the spirit of the humble, and the heart of the contrite ones." What I want to know *for myself* is, that this God is about my own path and my own bed, that He spieth out all my ways, careth for me, giveth His angels charge over me, that when I am in the solitude of my own chamber, His Spirit is with me; that those events in life, and those circumstances which perplex and pain and baffle me, are still overruled by Him, and that in reality He ordereth all my goings and appointeth every step *of my* way—this is what one so needs for the

especial cheering and guidance of our wilderness path, and this is what we so especially find revealed to us in God's own Word.

And in this chapter the Lord lifts up, as it were, the veil for a moment from our eyes and permits us to gaze upon that hidden machinery which He condescends to employ for the accomplishment of His purposes. And how strikingly is the purpose of mercy revealed in this instance, what wondrous agents and apparatus set in motion, and while one angel from heaven is commissioned to the house of Cornelius to bid him send for the missionary, and while his messengers are already on their road to summon him, the Lord was preparing the mind of that missionary at Joppa to obey the summons.

To Peter's uninstructed mind, indeed, such a summons would have sounded strange and repulsive. Jewish prejudices would have recoiled from an invitation which implied equality of the Gentile with a child of Abraham, and Jewish customs precluded any social intercourse between an Israelite and an heathen. "It is not lawful for a man that is a Jew to keep company nor to come unto one of another nation." Here, then, was a barrier raised up by human pride and prejudice, which would have effectually barred out God's purpose of mercy; but was God's love to be thwarted by man's exclusiveness,—was the proud and haughty Jew to stand aloof, and limit

heaven's inmates to those of his own faith and nation? The great mystery that had been hid from ages and from generations, that the Gentiles should be fellow-heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of the same promise in Christ, was now to be made manifest; and by a symbolical representation of the very clearest and plainest character the Lord graciously reveals to Peter this most glorious and gladdening truth.

Within that vast curtain, or sheet, which was represented in vision to the entranced Apostle, were enclosed "all manner of four-footed beasts of the earth, wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air." It took in the whole circumference of earth, from its four corners, from the East to the West, from the North to the South. It was let down from heaven to signify that all had the same origin—that the Creator of all was God, and that without Him was not anything made that was made. In this promiscuous assemblage, then, of wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air, were the representatives of all the nations upon earth, of those that were then eminent for their arts and civilization, as well as those that were still lying in the darkest savageness and ignorance. There, too, was represented our own land—no doubt among the creeping things, not yet emerged from the ooze and slime of its forests and morasses; and many an age and generation were yet to roll away, ere it more than

realized the widest limits of Rome's empire, and ere it carried that Gospel, which Peter was now to make known for the first time to the Gentile world in the person of a Roman centurion, to lands and climes of which Rome never heard nor dreamed, but which are now the offshoots of Britain's soil.

I cannot help thinking that in this comprehensive vision, though primarily intended for Peter's guidance in the case of Cornelius, a very instructive lesson is intended to be taught ourselves. Had it been for Peter only, the simple intimation from the Spirit, "Three men seek thee; go down with them, nothing doubting, for I have sent them," would have been sufficient. Peter undoubtedly would have at once obeyed and gone; but after ages would have missed the lesson which the vision emphatically taught to Peter, and would teach ourselves also. In God's own words that lesson is, "What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common." There are, no doubt, distinctions and differences on earth, various names by which the followers of the Lord Jesus have called themselves: as in our Father's house in heaven there are many mansions, but one house, so in our Lord's Church on earth, there are many branches, but one Church, of which Christ Jesus is the Head. And as in the material temple there are many stones, but only 'one chief corner stone, elect and precious,' so, I think, we see this

early vision shadowing out to ourselves this great and healing truth, that we are not to call common or unclean—we are not to repudiate and reject as "strangers and foreigners," but acknowledge and welcome as "fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God"—all who hold Christ Jesus as their Head, and who love Him in sincerity and truth.

SECTION LIV.

CHAP. X. 23—33. *Then called he them in, and lodged them. And on the morrow Peter went away with them, and certain brethren from Joppa accompanied him. And the morrow after they entered into Cæsarea. And Cornelius waited for them, and had called together his kinsmen and near friends. And as Peter was coming in, Cornelius met him, and fell down at his feet, and worshipped him. But Peter took him up, saying, Stand up; I myself also am a man. And as he talked with him, he went in, and found many that were come together. And he said unto them, Ye know how that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation; but God hath shewed me that I should not call any man common or unclean. Therefore came I unto you without gainsaying, as soon as I was sent for: I ask therefore for what intent ye have sent for me? And Cornelius said, Four days ago I was fasting until this hour; and at the ninth hour I prayed in my house, and, behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing, and said, Cornelius, thy prayer is heard, and thine alms are had in remembrance in the sight of God. Send, therefore, to*

Joppa, and call hither Simon, whose surname is Peter; he is lodged in the house of one Simon a tanner by the sea side: who, when he cometh, shall speak unto thee. Immediately therefore I sent to thee; and thou hast well done that thou art come. Now therefore we are all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God.

We do not find that there was the slightest hesitation or delay on Peter's part in obeying the heavenly vision. It is probable that he did not, even at this moment, comprehend the full extent of the Lord's purposes of mercy to the Gentile world; but what I think we are justified in pointing out for imitation is, the instant obedience of the Apostle to the Lord's mandate. He was fully aware of the prejudice his act would stir up, and he wisely provided against it by taking with him six men as witnesses of all that should occur; he was not unconscious of the obloquy and reproach, and it might be peril, which it would bring upon himself; nay, perhaps, he might be conscious within himself of some still lurking resistance and reluctance to hold out the hand of fellowship to a despised Gentile—and yet he obeyed without expostulation or demur.

It had not been so with Ananias. You remember he would have evaded the errand, though the Lord's commission ran as plain to him as to Peter, "Arise and go and enquire for Saul." "Three men seek thee, arise, and go down with them, nothing doubting." Four days were appa-

rently employed in this expedition to Joppa and back, not of course in the journey, any more than the parents of Jesus employed three days in their search for their lost child. "Four days ago," says Cornelius, "I was fasting until this hour," and on the morrow he despatches his messengers to Joppa. Peter detains them over the night at his lodgings by the sea-side, and on the morrow they set off on their journey to Cæsarea, and "on the morrow after," or the fourth day, they reached the house of Cornelius in the afternoon, or at the time of evening prayer.

I confess that I always read this portion of the chapter, and indeed to its conclusion, with intense interest, as giving us an account of the first missionary meeting on record. It is true that missionary gatherings in our days and in our country are for the purpose of devising ways and means and liberal things for sending the Gospel to others; this was to hear that Gospel preached to themselves. This, too, was indeed heralded and prepared for with far greater pomp of circumstance than missionary meetings now, at least to the outward eye. I can imagine the inmates of heaven, those angels of God, who so earnestly had longed to pierce the veil that hid these things even from heavenly sight, looking down with intensest interest, as one of their body winged his flight to Cæsarea on such an errand, and while such a glorious manifestation of God's purposes of

love to a Gentile world was being vouchsafed to the entranced Apostle on the roof-top of his humble home at Joppa. I can imagine that prayer which passed the Saviour's lips on earth in the contemplation of such an hour once more heard at the right-hand of God, "Father! glorify Thy name;" and, in reply, that Father's answer, "Ask of me and I will give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession."

And yet to other eyes and other ears the heavens gave no sound and revealed no vision; the busy traffickers of Joppa, intent upon their merchandise, cast no look of interest on that tanner's house by the sea-side; or if they saw or thought they saw some unwonted appearance in the sky, they might have anxiously said one to another, "It will be foul weather to-day, for the sky is red and lowering." Through the gay and gorgeous streets of Cæsarea no difference would be seen; ships as they entered its harbour would gaze on that magnificent temple, "To Cæsar and to Rome," whose worship on that day would receive its death-wound from the hands of a Galilean fisherman; troops might defile to Herod's palace, or spectators throng as usual to the crowded amphitheatre; and as perchance they passed the centurion's house, would either know not of or care not for that little missionary meeting which was to gather there that afternoon.

and which, when Cæsarea should be no more, when all its sumptuous and splendid edifices should be but "ruins of ruins," would alone give its greatest interest and renown to the memory of that once imperial city.

I do not know whether Cornelius meant anything more than a simple act of reverential homage when he threw himself at Peter's feet. Our translation certainly implies religious worship, and as such a posture was so unwonted and almost an unnatural one for a Roman officer to adopt, unless under strong religious feeling and awe, I am inclined to think that at the moment of Peter's entrance, some distinct purpose of devotion must have been meant. It is true he paid no such adoration to the angel, but as the angel bade him send for Peter to tell him words of eternal life, which he himself was not empowered to utter, he might naturally look on Peter as the superior being, and as such offer him adoration.

But be this as it may, Peter at once forbids the homage, "I also am a man." There is a striking significance in this expression in the mouth of Peter, and whether it be religious worship or reverential homage which Cornelius would have paid, the Apostle's language alike condemns either as unbecoming from man to man. And I cannot but think that Papal Rome may learn a salutary lesson for her guidance from Peter's own conduct, and forbear that adoration or homage to

canonized virgins and saints which so disfigures and pollutes her ritual.

Cornelius had gathered together in his house on this occasion his kinsmen and near friends. His was already the true fellowship of a Christian spirit, "ready to distribute, willing to communicate." And how evidently, too, had they all drank of that spirit which was in their kinsman; he speaks for them, as well as for himself, of the docile spirit, the united feeling, the anxious desire, the longing hope which pervaded all and knit together their hearts in love, "Now are we all here present before God to hear all things that are commanded thee of God." Holy, happy meeting! God's messenger, God's Word, and God's Spirit. Fitting inauguration of that predicted day, when the glory of God's people Israel should be the light to lighten the Gentiles also!

SECTION LV.

CHAP. X. 34—43. *Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him. The word which God sent unto the children of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ: (he is Lord of all:) that word, I say, ye know, which was published throughout all Judæa, and began from Galilee, after the baptism which John*

preached: how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him. And we are witnesses of all things which he did both in the land of the Jews, and in Jerusalem; whom they slew and hanged on a tree: him God raised up the third day, and shewed him openly; not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before of God, even to us, who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead. And he commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify that it is he which was ordained of God to be the Judge of quick and dead. To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins.

HERE we have the first missionary sermon upon record that was ever preached to the heathen world. It was delivered in a Roman officer's house in Cæsarea, and to an audience especially gathered together to hear from the preacher the things commanded him of God. Many a one has since been preached in the kraal of the Hottentot, the wigwam of the Indian, and the hut of the Greenlander; many a one by the wayside, beneath the shade of the palm and the banyan, on Indian plains, or the wild prairies of the West, in the deep glens of New Zealand, or by the sparkling shores of the South Sea islands. Many a one has been preached beneath a consecrated roof, and in a building made with hands and set apart especially for God's worship: but wherever missionary's foot has trodden or his voice been heard *and his* labour blessed—or in whatever pulpit

a minister of Christ has stood and delivered his message—never from that hour to this, never, till millennial days shall dawn, will there be a scene so full of deepest interest and import, as that in this room at Cæsarea.

It was indeed a noble and a glorious truth with which Peter commenced his address, that "God is no respecter of persons." Man *is*—man arrogates as his boast that which God repudiates as utterly inconsistent with his goodness, his justice, and his love. For many and many a century of outrage and wrong, man deemed the curse of God to rest on the seed of Ham, and denounced the negro race, those "images of God carved in ebony," as Fuller beautifully though quaintly calls them, as unfit and incapacitated, morally and intellectually, for education and admission into the brotherhood of man; and to this day, to the deep-dyed disgrace of self-called civilized States, a very large proportion of the Lord's human family is deprived of every social rite, and thrust aside without scruple or remorse from every human sympathy, as if they, and not their owners, were "without understanding and without natural affection, implacable and unmerciful."

But be it so with man's code and man's enactments: "God is no respecter of persons," nor his blessed Gospel either; in every nation—in despised Africa, as well as boastful America—"he

that feareth God and worketh righteousness is accepted of him." Be he who he may, the Gospel holds out no restrictions, erects no excluding barrier, sets up no warning board to bid trespassers pass on the other side; but it takes its stand in the highways, at the cross-roads, in the crowded market, dives into lanes and alleys, and cries to every passer-by, "Ho! everyone that thirsteth, come ye"—to Christ. Nay, the very charter of its mission is, "Go ye into all the world—preach the Gospel to every creature." In a word, what Peter preached to Cornelius and his kinsmen in the house at Cæsarea was the very same that Philip preached to the Æthiopian eunuch on that desert road that leadeth to Gaza —"He preached Jesus."

A question has often been painfully proposed with regard to this apparently unqualified assurance that "in every nation he that feareth God and worketh righteousness is accepted of Him;" and the erroneous inference that some draw from it is that the heathen after all may be left to themselves and to that measure of light and knowledge which they already possess, and that there is therefore no such urgency in missionary work. God did not, however, act on any such inference, nor the apostle either, nor was Cornelius left to that measure of light which he had; and to Him was abundantly realized that gracious *declaration* of Jesus, that "whosoever hath,

to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance." But the apostle's expression is not so unqualified and unguarded as it may seem. "He that worketh righteousness"—and who is he? "Jesus Christ is made unto us righteousness." As there is no other name, so is there no other righteousness; and the apostle Paul arguing on this very point of the admission of the Gentiles to an equal participation of spiritual privilege with the Jew, distinctly declares that "the Gentiles which followed not after righteousness, have (now) attained to righteousness, even the righteousness which is by faith."

I know there is another even more solemn question intimately connected with, and resulting from this; what will become of those heathen who know not God nor Jesus Christ whom He hath sent? Will they irrecoverably and finally perish? I dare not go beyond the word of the Lord my God to say more or less than that word warrants. Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right? Is God unrighteous? God forbid! But I think, without presuming to lift that veil, which the Lord has drawn over the final salvation of the heathen world, we may fairly draw the conclusion, which the apostle draws when enunciating the very same truth, which Peter here declares, that "there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek, for that the same Lord over all is rich unto *all that call upon*

Him," he distinctly adds, catching up as it were his last word that it may not be misunderstood, "whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved." And then asking those simple elementary questions, "How shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? How shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? How shall they hear without a preacher? and how shall a man preach except he be sent?" he deduces the bounden duty as well as the blessed privilege of sending that Gospel of peace, and those glad tidings of good things which the Gospel makes known, to those that, as yet, have not received them. I think that the best and most practical solution of the difficulty is, that whatsoever our hand findeth and our heart desireth to do in this matter, to do it with all our might, because the night cometh when no man can work.

SECTION LVI.

CHAP. X. 44—48. *While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word. And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost. For they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God. Then answered Peter, Can any man forbid water, that*

these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we? And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then prayed they him to tarry certain days.

It is not often that we are permitted to witness the full results of man's preaching: nor is it probable that such an abundant and speedy harvest springs up from the seed he sows. Our Lord intimates as much, when He recounts the various obstacles and hindrances that choke the word and render it unfruitful. Yet the Lord does occasionally vouchsafe such glorious manifestations of His power and goodness, that the sower may know that all is of God, and that He alone giveth and can give the increase. It was not often, however, even in apostolic days, that such manifestations were afforded—at one sermon indeed of Peter's we are told that such demonstration of the Spirit accompanied the preacher's words, that above 3,000 souls were added to the Church—and at another, that through the same mighty working the number of them that believed was about 5,000. And here, though numbers are not specified, and of course could be but scanty, yet the Holy Ghost fell *on all* who heard the Word. Not one grain was missing; no fowl of the air, seeing a corn-seed here and there lying heedless on the way-side, came and devoured it; no enemy was permitted to come stealthily in while any slept, and scatter noxious seed

among the wheat. "Great grace was upon them all"—and then were abundantly realized those words of their Psalmist, that even "strangers submitted themselves, and as soon as they heard they were obedient."

I think, indeed, that we might see far more of these blessed fruits in our own congregations, if we came together with similar sincerity and purpose of heart; and if we too, when we professed to meet in the name of Jesus, could as honestly, in the sight of God, say as Cornelius said of his kinsmen and friends, "Now are we all here present before God to hear *all* things that are commanded thee of God." Both the listening ear and the open and obedient heart are wanted for the profitable reception of the Word of God; and then must the Holy Spirit seal his own work, and give the increase.

Peter's sermon, like Daniel's prayer, seems to have been sweetly broken in upon by the Lord's answer: "Whiles I was praying," says the prophet, "and presenting my supplication," the angel brought him the answer; and "while Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all which heard the Word:" nay, as Peter himself tells us in the next chapter, ere he had scarcely entered on his theme, that God might have all the glory, "as he began to speak," the Holy Ghost fell on them as unmistakeably and unquestionably as on themselves on the day of Pentecost.

It appears that this descent of the Holy Ghost was especially and visibly accompanied by those miraculous gifts and powers, which had been so abundantly bestowed on the Apostles themselves and other Jewish converts, though one cannot doubt that it was associated also with inward grace and sanctification of the Spirit. One can well understand the astonishment which must have pervaded the whole meeting at such a display of the Lord's unparalleled mercy and goodness: how the hearts of Cornelius and his kinsmen, and those of his more immediate household who had so often joined with him in prayer and other holy exercises, must, even in the midst of deep humility, have overflowed with "wonder, love, and praise," as the Spirit thus witnessed with their spirits that they too were the accepted and acknowledged children of God.

But how naturally and how truthfully does Luke pass over all mention of their astonishment and joy to record that of Peter and his companions—how they of the circumcision, who had accompanied the Apostle from Joppa, "were astonished"—or as the original word far more strongly expresses it, "were transported out of themselves," were "beside themselves" (2 Cor. v. 13; Mark iii. 21), "because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost." I hardly know any expression or text which so clearly calls to mind the strong and

deep-rooted prejudice which even at that moment must have lingered in the Jewish heart. I do not say that it implies or means any jealousy or grudging of this gift of God to their Gentile brethren; or that when the Apostle saw this undoubted manifestation of the Lord's work, he did not immediately perceive and acknowledge the full meaning of that vision which had been vouchsafed to himself, and which up to this moment he had but imperfectly understood. Nor do I mean that the Apostle held back a single moment in welcoming, as brothers beloved in the Lord, those whom God himself had so signally chosen and approved. But I think that up to that moment Peter had not read the Lord's will fully, and that his very first expression, while it intimates his perfect acquiescence and readiness to carry out that will, gives utterance also to the feeling which had but just before occupied his own heart, and might still be lingering in the minds of those who had come with him, and to whom the question is addressed, "Can any man forbid water that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we?" "Then commanded he them to be baptized in the name of the Lord."

Oh! glorious conclusion of this most memorable day in the world's annals, when was at length made clear that mystery so long before foretold to Abraham that "in his seed all the nations of the

earth should be blessed," and which yet every child of Abraham had disbelieved or misunderstood until that day!

SECTION LVII.

CHAP. XI. 1—18. *And the apostles and brethren that were in Judea heard that the Gentiles had also received the word of God. And when Peter was come up to Jerusalem, they that were of the circumcision contended with him, saying, Thou wentest in to men uncircumcised, and didst eat with them. But Peter rehearsed the matter from the beginning, and expounded it by order unto them, saying, I was in the city of Joppa praying: and in a trance I saw a vision. A certain vessel descend, as it had been a great sheet, let down from heaven by four corners; and it came even to me: upon the which when I had fastened mine eyes, I considered, and saw four-footed beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air. And I heard a voice saying unto me, Arise, Peter; slay, and eat. But I said, Not so, Lord: for nothing common or unclean hath at any time entered into my mouth. But the voice answered me again from heaven, What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common. And this was done three times: and all were drawn up again into heaven. And, behold, immediately there were three men already come unto the house where I was, sent from Cæsarea unto me. And the Spirit bade me go with them, nothing doubting. Moreover, these six brethren accompanied me, and we entered into the man's house: and he showed us how he had seen an angel in his house, which stood and said unto him, Send men to Joppa, and call for Simon, whose sur-*

name is Peter; who shall tell thee words, whereby thou and all thy house shall be saved. And as I began to speak, the Holy Ghost fell on them, as on us at the beginning. Then remembered I the word of the Lord, how that he said, John indeed baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost. Forasmuch then as God gave them the like gift as he did unto us, who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, what was I, that I could withstand God? When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life.

I THINK that this portion of our chapter is a very striking illustration of our Lord's remark that there were men "who strained at a gnat, and swallowed a camel," and that it more fully exemplifies that haughty exclusiveness and religious arrogance, which characterized the Jew than almost any other portion of Scripture. It is true, while Jesus was on earth, one of the charges brought against Him by the Scribes and Pharisees, those embodiments of narrow-mindedness and bigotry, was, "Why eateth your Master with publicans and sinners?" and He had said, "The servant is not greater than his Lord: if they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you." And so here we find a charge brought against Peter, and that, too, by his own brethren, of exactly the same character, for his conduct in the matter of Cornelius.

There is no reason to suppose that the events at Cæsarea had been reported otherwise than they

really were, though the previous preparation of the Apostle's mind at Joppa might be, and probably was, unknown. We are distinctly told that the apostles and brethren that were in Judea had heard that the Gentiles also had received the Word of God; and one can hardly doubt that the accompanying gift of the Holy Ghost and the subsequent rite of baptism had been reported also; and, at any rate, it was well known that Peter had been the active and immediate agent in the matter. And yet the charge brought against the Apostle by some of the circumcision is,—not that he had preached Jesus to this Gentile household—not that he had commanded Gentiles to be baptized—not that he had admitted them into the Church among those that should be saved—but that "he did eat with men that were uncircumcised!" Instead of owning the glorious work of God, instead of rejoicing over the added numbers of their Master's kingdom, and the boundless hopes it held out of the extension of that kingdom to the utmost limits of the habitable globe, when sons should come from far, and daughters be nursed at their side, when, in the noble language of their Prophet, "the gates should be open continually, and they should not be shut day nor night, that the forces of the Gentiles might be brought in;" instead of that outburst of praise which resounded through heaven, "The kingdoms of this world are be-

come the kingdom of the Lord and of his Christ, and He shall reign for ever," it was simply this pitiful and paltry accusation, "Thou didst eat with men that were uncircumcised."

It is, no doubt, a very valuable rule which the Apostle lays down, "Giving no offence in anything that the ministry be not blamed," and it requires much grace to "walk in wisdom towards them that are without," so that even one's very good be not evil spoken of. But I think in these days there is too much standing aloof, too much of the spirit of these men of the circumcision, which would thrust aside and reject others as uncircumcised, though they are partakers of the same privileges, having one and the same hope of our calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in all: and which presumes to sit in judgment on others, who do go in and are ready to hold out the right hand of fellowship, and welcome every brother, that prepareth his heart to seek God, the Lord God of his fathers, even though he be not cleansed according to the purification of the sanctuary, and who, like the Apostle, claims the liberty for himself after the way others may call heresy, to worship the God of his fathers. How well for us, as some one remarks, that the grace of our good God is so much more extensive than the charity even of *some* good men!

Peter justifies his proceedings by recounting what had occurred to himself in the city of Joppa, evidently meaning to imply that he had himself shared their prejudices, and would have been as unwilling as the most exclusive Jew to compromise his own position and principles, had not the Lord so unmistakeably revealed His will and purpose to him. We need not go over the same ground again, but I would just point out to you a very important addition, which Peter makes to the address of the angel to Cornelius. Cornelius represents the angel as simply saying that Peter when come would tell him what he ought to do; but Peter, in repeating what the centurion did actually declare that the angel had spoken unto him, tells us that the expression was, "He shall tell thee words, whereby thou and all thy household shall be saved."

One remembers how the Lord blessed the house of Obed-edom because of the Ark of God that was in it; and we see here how a godly Master's influence and example extend to his whole household, and how they became sharers in those gracious privileges which are vouchsafed to the head, like the holy oil of priesthood, which descended to the very skirts of the high priest's clothing. We do not, of course, know who, or how many were the members of this family of Cornelius; we read of two household servants and a devout soldier of them that waited on him con-

tinually; and, no doubt, his rank and positior justified many more: and when we remember tha the servants of a Roman household were almos altogether slaves, one is the more struck with tha spirit, so far beyond his age, in the heart of Cor nelius, which had led him, even before his know ledge of the Gospel, to look on those beneath hi roof, if not as brethren in the Lord, at least a brethren in the flesh. His alms and his prayer had indeed gone up to heaven as a memoria before God—and what an abundant answer di they bring!—but they could not in themselve give salvation to Cornelius nor the inmates of hi house, they could not make clear the way, no open the doors of everlasting life to any son o Adam; but God sent him in return, by the moutl of his servant Peter, words whereby he and al his house should be saved; Peter had once said t Jesus, "Lord! to whom shall we go? Thou has the words of eternal life;" and those words h preached to Cornelius and all his house.

SECTION LVIII.

CHAP. XI. 19—30. *Now they which were scattered abroa upon the persecution that arose about Stephen travelled far as Phenice, and Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching t word to none but unto the Jews only. And some of the*

were men of Cyprus and Cyrene, which, when they were come to Antioch, spake unto the Grecians, preaching the Lord Jesus. And the hand of the Lord was with them: and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord. Then tidings of these things came unto the ears of the church which was in Jerusalem: and they sent forth Barnabas, that he should go as far as Antioch. Who, when he came, and had seen the grace of God, was glad, and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord. For he was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith: and much people was added unto the Lord. Then departed Barnabas to Tarsus, for to seek Saul: and when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch. And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people. And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch. And in these days came prophets from Jerusalem unto Antioch. And there stood up one of them named Agabus, and signified by the spirit that there should be great dearth throughout all the world: which came to pass in the days of Claudius Cæsar. Then the disciples, every man according to his ability, determined to send relief unto the brethren which dwelt in Judæa: which also they did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul.

THIS first verse carries us back to the martyrdom of Stephen, and we see, in this incidental allusion to it, how even that sad and melancholy event, which caused such great lamentation and dismay among the brethren, was yet overruled of God to purposes of great mercy in the more extended diffusion of the Gospel. As the hurricane and the whirlwind in their fury scatter the seeds of the earth in every direction, not to perish, but to

vegetate and bring forth fruit, so "the persecution which arose about Stephen" scattered the disciples abroad in many a quarter which would otherwise have been unvisited, and who prepared the ground and sowed the seed which was to bring forth such an abundant harvest to the glory of God and the setting up of the kingdom of the Lord Jesus.

But, though all this is plainly intimated, and we distinctly see how the blood of the martyr became, through the grace of God, the seed of the Church, yet there is another thought which this mention of Stephen naturally awakens; and one's memory almost instinctively turns to that "young man, Saul, who was consenting unto his death, and kept the raiment of them that slew him." Then, he was at Jerusalem, high in authority and power, "punishing oft in every synagogue them that called on the name of the Lord Jesus," "compelling them to blaspheme," and "exceedingly mad against them, persecuting them even to strange cities." What a description of the blind, ungodly rage of a furious persecutor—and how often since realized! And where is he now? A fugitive and an exile, and his own countrymen going about to slay him. And why? For preaching that very Name for which Stephen shed his blood!

Yes! since that death of Stephen, the Lord had done marvellous things, and had made His Name

known among all nations, at least of the civilized world. When the martyr died, the faith of Christ had not been preached beyond the confines of Jerusalem; and though, no doubt, many a convert, from that day of Pentecost, had returned to his own home in other lands, and carried the wondrous tidings with him, still there had been no systematic, purposed preaching of the Gospel beyond the narrow limits of Judæa. Till Stephen's death even Samaria was unvisited: and I cannot but think that there is a most awful and significant meaning in the fact that throughout the whole of the Acts of the Apostles Galilee is never visited, never named. The woe denounced on her cities, on Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum, had already begun, and, like less guilty Tyre and Sidon, like less guilty Sodom and Gomorrah, they were henceforth to be memorials of the Lord's righteous retribution, because they knew not and they regarded not the day of their visitation!

But, though Galilee was apparently passed by, though no herald of glad tidings was again commissioned to visit those cities and villages, and hills and shores, which the Saviour Himself had traversed in vain—what a vast length and breadth of a fruitful field had been sown since the death of that first martyr, Stephen! Æthiopia even then had stretched out her hands to God, and God had sent her a message of good-will and

love by that traveller with whom Philip came in contact—and we find in this portion of our chapter men of Cyrene, men from Africa itself, preaching the Lord Jesus at Antioch. We know, too, that Paul preached at Damascus, and that there were Christians in that city even before, and that he had remained for three years in Arabia; and can we imagine that his voice was altogether silent during that lengthened period, that his heart did not burn within him, and that at the last he spake with his tongue of the great things the Lord had done for him? We know, too, that he was now in Cilicia, and, though a prophet has little or no honour in his own country, yet, through evil as well as good report, is the disciple of the Lord Jesus to approve himself a faithful minister of Christ; and we can hardly doubt that those brethren of Cilicia mentioned (Acts xv. 23) in conjunction with those of Antioch and Syria, and for whose spiritual privileges and liberty Paul was so jealous, were among the fruits of that apparent period of exile at Tarsus.

It is in this chapter that Antioch is brought more prominently to our notice. We have nothing to do with its splendour and magnificence, its licentiousness and luxury; we care not now that in its proud and palmy days it was the resort of all that was noble, and learned, and gay, of the soldier and philosopher as well as the lover of pleasure, the idle, and the frivolous. We may

sigh to think that a revenue of 30,000*l.* was annually devoted to its public pleasures; and still more mourn that the historian of the "Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire" has not shunned to describe with all the embellishment of voluptuous language the temple and the groves of Daphne; but the dearest memorial of Antioch to every Christian heart is that the name he bears was first given to the disciples there. In all probability it was a name of ridicule at first, but to be a Christian in name and in deed is now the noblest title and most honoured appellation which the world can give; and, like the cross of Christ, which was to the Greeks foolishness and to the Jews a stumbling block, so every Christian heart is ready to exclaim, "God forbid! that I should glory in any other name save that of Christ!" I think we may say in the spirit of his words, who so faithfully preached Christ at Antioch, "The name of 'Christian' never faileth; whether there be earthly names they shall fail; whether there be titles they shall cease; whether there be distinctions of ranks, and parties, and sects, they shall vanish away, but in heaven all the redeemed will be Christ's, will be Christians; every other name swallowed up and lost; as on the mount of transfiguration, Moses and Elijah, the Law and the Prophets, vanished out of sight, and Jesus alone remained, so all distinctions of human calling, whether affixed in scorn and derision, or

bestowed in deepest reverence and love, all will alike pass away and be forgotten, save the dearest, the sweetest, and the noblest of all; and even then it will be 'a new name,' as new, as dear, and as sweet as from the very first."

SECTION LIX.

CHAP. XII. 1—10. *Now about that time Herod the king stretched forth his hands to vex certain of the church. And he killed James the brother of John with the sword. And because he saw it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to take Peter also. (Then were the days of unleavened bread.) And when he had apprehended him, he put him in prison, and delivered him to four quaternions of soldiers to keep him; intending after Easter to bring him forth to the people. Peter therefore was kept in prison: but prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him. And when Herod would have brought him forth, the same night Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains: and the keepers before the door kept the prison. And, behold, the angel of the Lord came upon him, and a light shined in the prison: and he smote Peter on the side, and raised him up, saying, Arise up quickly. And his chains fell off from his hands. And the angel said unto him, Gird thyself, and bind on thy sandals. And so he did. And he saith unto him, Cast thy garment about thee, and follow me. And he went out, and followed him; and wist not that it was true which was done by the angel; but thought he saw a vision. When they were past the first and the second ward, they came unto the iron gate that leadeth*

unto the city; which opened to them of his own accord: and they went out, and passed on through one street; and forthwith the angel departed from him.

THIS chapter recalls to our remembrance how the mother of James and John during our Lord's sojourn on earth came to Him, and entreated for her two sons, that they might sit, the one on his right hand and the other on his left in His kingdom; and that Jesus in reply, addressing the two disciples who had evidently accompanied their mother and joined in her petition, asked them if they could drink of the cup which He had to drink, and be baptized with the baptism wherewith He should be baptized. They, no doubt unconscious of his meaning, but willing to show their zeal and readiness to follow their master whithersoever He went, answered that they could. This chapter, as far at least as one of them is concerned, explains our Lord's meaning.

Many a mother, like Salome, has perhaps sought high things for her children, and has had her own heart and ambitious hopes fixed on things of time and of the world; and as perhaps disappointment and failure have followed, she may have murmured and mourned, or she may have had grace to see that her prayer was an unwise one, and that the Lord in mercy had denied the request of her lips. I am afraid many a parent has fallen into Salome's sin even in their prayers for their children. And yet the Lord did

not deny the mother's petition as regarded one of her sons, though in a totally contrary sense to what she expected or desired. I know not if Salome lived to witness her son's martyrdom, and shed tears over his early grave; if she did, she certainly could not sorrow as one without hope. She, who had undoubtedly stood by the side of Jesus's cross, and had been one of those who were

"Last at the cross, and earliest at the grave,"

must have known the full bitterness and meaning of that baptism, and that cup of which Jesus himself had first drank, and of which He foretold her son also should partake.

One reads in the Books of Kings how often it is said of the monarchs of Israel and Judah that they walked each one in the steps of his father to do evil in the sight of the Lord: and it is sad to think how far and wide a father's evil example will extend itself. Herod Agrippa, the murderer of James, was the grandson of that Herod the Great * whom we meet with at the beginning of the New Testament as King of Judæa at the time of our Saviour's birth, and by whose command, in his vain attempt to destroy Jesus, the massacre of the Innocents at Bethlehem had been perpetrated. He was also brother of

* Archbishop Sumner in his Commentary on this chapter states that this Herod Agrippa who put James to death, was the grandson of Herod Antipas who beheaded John Baptist. I cannot but think the statement an oversight.

that Herodias, the adulterous wife of Herod Antipas, at whose instigation John the Baptist had been beheaded; so that cruelty and persecution against the Lord's people would seem to have been hereditary in that Edomite race.

This martyrdom of James was the first rent in that little band of Apostles who had companied together all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among them. Why he was the first taken to his rest—why he was chosen for his early grave, and so soon to join his fellow-martyr Stephen—why his career of ministerial usefulness was so prematurely closed, we know not, and we need not ask; as Jesus said to John his brother on another occasion,—What is that to us, follow we the Lord. There must have been natural sorrow over the blood-stained tomb of their companion, as there was great lamentation at Stephen's burial: when death enters for the first time into an hitherto unbroken circle, and such a death too, tears will flow. And though no doubt to the martyr himself it was the blessed realization of all, and far beyond all, that himself had ever hoped, or had ever entered into his own or his mother's imagination to conceive at the right hand of Jesus; and though to him first of all that apostolic band was fulfilled his Saviour's prayer, that he might be with Him where He was, and behold his glory,—yet still it was a period of deep anxiety and peril to the survivors, and they might

have said, in the touching language of the aged patriarch, "Stephen is not, and James is not, and ye will take Peter away; all these things are against us."

But God was for them, and to Him they betook themselves; "prayer was made without ceasing of the Church unto God" for Peter. Oh! what a blessed privilege, whether for individuals, or churches, or nations, to take every trial to God, to give him no rest day nor night—without ceasing of the whole Church. It was indeed a time of urgency, too: Herod took no half measures in the matter; he had already tasted blood, and finding that he had ready abettors in the people, he was earnest to ingratiate himself still more with them by proceeding to the same extremities with Peter, and the day was at hand when the sentence was to be executed on him, as it had been on James. The night alone intervened; on the morrow the prisoner was to be brought forth to his doom of death: nor was Herod a man to be baulked of his prey. He had probably heard of their former deliverance or escape from prison, and he would therefore baffle every effort, save that alone which neither bars, nor bolts, nor guards, nor fetters could arrest. It was not the first time that the Jews had guarded against the poor, feeble, timid efforts of the disciples: they too had set a watch over the sepulchre of Jesus, they had sealed the stone that guarded its

entrance, and taken every precaution that human fear and ingenuity could suggest, and yet the Lord had them in derision, as He had Herod now. As the angel of the Lord rolled away the stone from the sepulchre, so at another angel's word the fetters fell from Peter's hands, the doors were unloosed, and he was let go free.

SECTION LX.

CHAP. XII. 11—19. *And when Peter was come to himself, he said, Now I know of a surety, that the Lord hath sent his angel, and hath delivered me out of the hand of Herod, and from all the expectation of the people of the Jews. And when he had considered the thing, he came to the house of Mary the mother of John, whose surname was Mark; where many were gathered together praying. And as Peter knocked at the door of the gate, a damsel came to hearken, named Rhoda. And when she knew Peter's voice, she opened not the gate for gladness, but ran in, and told how Peter stood before the gate. And they said unto her, Thou art mad. But she constantly affirmed that it was even so. Then said they, It is his angel. But Peter continued knocking: and when they had opened the door, and saw him, they were astonished. But he, beckoning unto them with the hand to hold their peace, declared unto them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. And he said, Go shew these things unto James, and to the brethren. And he departed, and went into another place. Now as soon as it was day, there was no small stir among the soldiers what was become of Peter. And when Herod had sought for him, and found him not,*

he examined the keepers, and commanded that they should be put to death. And he went down from Judæa to Cæsarea, and there abode.

Our Lord, speaking of the days of desolation that were yet to come upon Jerusalem and Judæa, and of the wonderful preservation that should be vouchsafed to His own people in that season of peril, had illustrated His remark by saying, "Two men shall be in the field, two women grinding at the mill; the one shall be taken, and the other left." It was so here in the prison-house of Herod—of the two immured within its walls, though both alike dear to and approved of the Lord, the one was taken away to a premature and bloody death, and the other left, preserved for future services and continued labours, till he, too, in his Lord's own appointed time, should likewise close his life on earth at another tyrant's bidding. Why was this—the one led forth to execution, the other taken from the same prison by an angel's guidance, and restored by a miracle to freedom? The simple answer to all such inquiries is, "Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Thy sight." The one went forth to death with a calm and Christian spirit, and, like his predecessor, Stephen, forgiving even his enemies.* The

* I am induced to record in a note, what perhaps I would hardly admit into the text, how Eusebius relates that the man who had dragged James before Herod's tribunal, when he saw the calmness with which he submitted to martyrdom,

other laboured on in his Master's cause—and thus, both to the living and to the dying, to live was Christ, and to die was gain.

It is another sweet picture which is here presented to us of a prayerful household. We had that of Cornelius just before, and, as with him, so here also, is the Lord's blessing on the practice peculiarly noticed. It has always struck me as one of the noticeable peculiarities of the Word of God that the Bible so especially delights to record the instances of those more domestic, home graces and virtues which are so within the reach and attainment of all; and of none is there such an abundant exhibition as that of household religion and family prayer. It is God's own record of Abraham—it was Joshua's holy resolution—and of Job is it said, "Thus did Job *continually*," that is, gather his children and family around him every morning to commit them unto God's protection for the day. Of David, too, is it expressly said that after the labours and cares of the day he also "returned to bless his household;" and we

was, like Judas, struck with remorse; but, unlike him, by one of those sudden conversions not infrequent amidst the remarkable effusions of the Holy Spirit, was himself turned from the power of Satan unto God. He confessed Christ with great cheerfulness. James and this man were both led to execution, and in the way thither the accuser requested the Apostle's forgiveness. James, turning to him, answered, "Peace be to thee," and kissed him, and they were both beheaded together. Euseb. i. 9.

all know how the Lord blessed the house of Obed-edom, because of the ark of God which was beneath his roof. The house of Cornelius, we have lately read, amid all the impediments and hindrances of station, position, and military duties, was essentially a house of prayer, and eventually every soul within it became a living temple of the living God.

And, I think, in the instance now before us of this praying family, we have another sweet and precious truth intimated to us, how the Lord loves, and condescends to associate and connect in His own record the name of a pious mother with that of a pious child, trained by her counsels, and early led by her practice and example to the love of God and of His Word. It is so here—the house is Mary's, and Mary is "the mother of Mark, whose surname is John." It is the same with Timothy, whose mother Eunice and whose grandmother Lois are so imperishably interwoven with his own name that few think of that beloved disciple, and Paul's son in the faith, without recalling to his memory those holy women who trained his early years: and many a grateful record of "Christian Biography" has attested the undying debt which redeemed ones now in heaven have owed, through the gift of God, to a pious mother. Oh! that every mother in our land knew and felt her wondrous privilege and power! Oh! that every father went hand in hand with every mother

in the blessed work of training their children for God!

But this household of Mary's, as well as that of Cornelius, names the servants of the family; and I think there is much that is encouraging to them in this record of Rhoda's name, preserving, as it were, its fragrance through so many ages, as a servant in such a prayerful family as that which had now met beneath the roof of Mary. Peter, no doubt, had often been a visitor there, and was associated by ties of Christian fellowship with Mary and her son, as well as her brother Barnabas, so justly called "the son of consolation," and who probably on this night of sorrow and anxiety led the prayers of the meeting. It was therefore natural that when left to his own guidance and judgment, Peter should at once direct his steps to a spot where he could not but feel assured that he should meet with many a Christian friend. Rhoda's loving heart, like that of the little maiden in the family of Naaman the Syrian, was no doubt as anxious as the rest for what so nearly concerned the happiness of all: and to her was first communicated the intelligence of the safety of him for whom such earnest prayer had been and was still going up before the Lord. And how true to nature was her act! how we feel, as if in our eagerness to tell the news, we should instinctively have done the very thing she did, rush back into the room, and exclaim that

Peter was at the gate. They naturally, too, doubted her intelligence, but Rhoda knew his voice too well, and a few moments more solved every doubt, when Peter stood before them, and recounted the particulars of his miraculous deliverance to their astonishment and joy. And thus, though heaviness endured for a night, yet joy came in the morning.

We know how the household of Mary passed their night: sorrow and anxiety permitted them not to sleep, and so they betook themselves to prayer. We do not know how Herod passed his night; he might, for aught we know, be most punctilious in the outward ceremonials of his religion, and might go to his rest with a conscience quite at ease, or without a moment's thought or care for the prisoner, who was to be brought forth for execution on the morrow; or if he did give a thought to the tenant of that cell, he too might have said, as a haughtier monarch had before said, "Who is that God that shall deliver you out of my hands?" Could he have seen the calm and peaceful slumber of his victim, he might perchance have thought of him in Israelitish history, who once slept as soundly with the ground for his bed and the stones for his pillow, and whom the angels of God visited as he lay there, and made that resting-place to him "none other than the house of God, and the gate *of* heaven."

We know, however, how the morning dawned on the rage and disappointment of a baffled tyrant. And as no one could tell nor explain how the prisoner had been delivered, it was perhaps no unnatural suspicion that it could be only through the connivance and complicity of his keepers: and they were accordingly condemned to death. But God's hour was at hand, and Herod himself must, ere long, stand with his victim and his guards before the judgment-seat of God.

SECTION LXI.

CHAP. XII. 20—25. *And Herod was greatly displeased with them of Tyre and Sidon; but they came with one accord to him, and having made Blastus the king's chamberlain their friend desired peace; because their country was nourished by the king's country. And upon a set day Herod, arrayed in royal apparel, sat upon his throne, and made an oration unto them. And the people gave a shout, saying, It is the voice of a God, and not of a man. And immediately the angel of the Lord smote him, because he gave not God the glory: and he was eaten of worms, and gave up the ghost. But the word of God grew and multiplied. And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem, when they had fulfilled their ministry, and took with them John, whose surname was Mark.*

IT was an awful hour, awful in its unexpectedness and unpreparedness, when God said to the rich man, who was hugging himself on the

certainty of his many years of enjoyment yet to come, "This night thy soul shall be required of thee." With him, it would appear, there was but a step between life and death—between the summons and the judgment-seat of God; God spake the word and it was done—He commanded, and the trembling spirit returned to Him who gave it. It was, perhaps, a more appalling hour, when in the midst of "his luxury and profaneness, his gaming and all dissoluteness, and total forgetfulness of God, sitting and toying with his concubines," Charles II. of England was smitten of death; yet to him was a space granted, an interval, though but of a few days, allowed—and, alas! we know how that interval was occupied—in making his peace with the Church of Rome, and throwing off at the last moment that covering of hypocrisy which it was no longer his interest to wear.

It was, too, in the midst of his splendour and magnificence that Herod Agrippa was smitten in his imperial city of Cæsarea, in his royal robes, on an occasion of festivity, amid his courtiers and flatterers and applauding people in the public theatre, while the shouts of the admiring crowds comparing him to a god were yet ringing in his ears—at that very moment was the mandate issued, "Hew down the tree, and destroy it." We learn from the Jewish historian that to Herod, as to Charles, there was an interval

between the sentence and its execution: and there is this striking coincidence in the narrative of the one and the other, that the expression of the English writer most remarkable, applies to this present incident. "In six days," says Evelyn, "all was in the dust," and on the 1st of August was Herod smitten, and on the 6th he died.*

I do not know that I need go beyond the sacred narrative, so simple and so brief, and yet so striking in its very simplicity; but, as I have alluded to the employment of that space of time allotted to our own monarch, I would just add that, according to the narrative of Josephus, Herod recognized the hand of God in his disease, rebuked the flattery of those that had called him more than mortal, and prepared to meet his end, if not in a holy or repentant frame, at least with decency and decorum.

The lesson is, indeed, a very striking one. I am afraid it was unheeded by those who witnessed it, and that in their sorrow for a popular monarch, they regarded not the crimes and follies and extravagances that had marked his course. His life was, indeed, an adventurous and a varied one; and yet to the Christian reader of his Bible, all that is known of Herod is recorded in this chapter, his putting James to death, his intention to follow that up by the execution of Peter also,

* Conybeare and Howson.

his sentence of death against the soldiers who had the custody of the Apostle, and his own miserable and tortured end.

I know not whether, during those hours of agony which Herod endured, any thought or recollection of the martyred one glanced across his mind: probably not, or if it did, he might look upon it as one of those acts in which he had thought to do God service. We are assuredly not in any degree justified in ascribing the most excruciating pains, or the most loathsome disease, to the penal sentence of God's righteous indignation. In the present instance it was undoubtedly so: for our profit and our warning the Holy Spirit has recorded that God expressly sent forth an angel to smite the proud monarch in the very moment when, like the King of Babylon, his heart was exulting within him that he had at length attained the summit of his ambition and was the acknowledged "King" of all the territories his grandfather had enjoyed.

And yet to the eyes of the assembly in the theatre no angel's form was seen, nor angel's voice heard, crying, "Hew down the tree;" to them it would seem but as an interruption of a gorgeous festival; and they might lament it more for their own than the sufferer's sake. And it is worthy of observation that this visitation on Herod was consequent on his pride, and not on his cruelty.

We might have thought, perhaps, in our

narrow-sightedness, how far more desirable both for himself and the Church, had Herod died ere he had "stretched forth his hand to vex certain of the Church," or had cut off in the midst of his usefulness so valuable a member of it. But God's times and ways are not our times and ways, and Herod's miserable end still remains on record, a memorable proof of God's Word that "he that being often reproved hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy."*

It is refreshing to turn from this scene of impiety and blasphemy in the theatre, and of death in the palace, at Cæsarea, to the humbler but far more valuable incidents of Barnabas and Saul. Notwithstanding persecution and outrage, "the Word of God grew and multiplied"—and we are now about to enter on the far wider field of missionary enterprise in which those holy men of God proceeded to labour. In the close of the last chapter we read that Barnabas and Saul had gone to Jerusalem with contributions and alms for the poor during the time of famine—and we now find them returning to Antioch, accompanied by Mark, the nephew of Barnabas, in whose

* No doubt history relates many attacks of disease similar to this of Herod on persecutors and tyrants. The most remarkable, as far, at least, as the expression goes, is that recorded by Herodotus of Pheretime, Queen of Cyrene, of whom he says, "ζῶσα ενχεῶν ἐξέζεσε," "even while yet living she swarmed with worms."

mother Mary's house such earnest prayer had been offered up for Simon.

SECTION LXII.

CHAP. XIII. 1—5. *Now there were in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers; as Barnabas, and Simeon that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen, which had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them. And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away. So they, being sent forth by the Holy Ghost, departed unto Seleucia; and from thence they sailed to Cyprus. And when they were at Salamis, they preached the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews, and they had also John to their minister.*

WE have now arrived at that period of the apostolic history in which we are henceforward to bid farewell to the labours of the rest of the apostles; and Paul and his immediate companions are now to be the chief and most prominent personages in the narrative. It may, perhaps, excite a transient surprise, and it certainly deserves a passing observation, that of those twelve chosen followers of the Lord, who had "companied with Him in His going out and coming in among them," over whom, and for whom, and with whom He had so

often and so earnestly prayed—who had been eye-witnesses of so many of His miracles—who had sate with Him at the last passover in that upper chamber, and had heard His parting counsels—who had been witnesses, also, of their Master's Resurrection and Ascension, and had themselves partaken of that gift of the Holy Ghost on the day of Pentecost—it is remarkable that so little is said of any, and nothing at all of so many.

In the first verse of this chapter we have the names of five disciples, three of whom, at least, we hear of, for the first and the last time,* as taking an active and important part in the work of the ministry, and as instruments in the hands of the Holy Ghost for the setting apart of Barnabas and Saul for the work to which they were henceforth to be especially commissioned. And yet of the apostles six at least are passed over in perfect silence in this narrative of their acts, their names not even mentioned nor alluded to—that of the first called of their number, Andrew himself, the human instrument of leading his brother Peter to Jesus, and the one last enrolled among the band, after his being chosen as an apostle, are alike unnoticed and unknown.

You may indeed ask, Why is this? but I cannot tell you. I might, indeed, suggest many reasons

* Unless, indeed, the Simeon called Niger be the cross-bearer of Christ mentioned in the Gospel, and the Lucius named in Rom. xvi. be the Lucius here mentioned.

why it should be so. I can see great fitness in the appointment that the Holy Spirit has confined our view to the one great event in which we are the most deeply interested, the gradual spreading of the Gospel among the Gentiles, instead of our following each labourer to his respective field. And, perhaps, if each portion of each apostle's toils and perils and persecutions were as minutely and as circumstantially detailed as those of Paul, we too might say, as John said, "I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that might have been written." And I think, too, we may add that even if their names had been recorded in these annals—if we had been told, in all its miraculous detail, how Satan fell like lightning from heaven before them, how they had power to tread on serpents and scorpions and over all the power of the enemy, and how spirits were subject unto them, it would have been a far more intense and grateful theme of rejoicing that their names were written in heaven.

At the present moment, though Saul is henceforth to hold the most prominent place in the future narrative, he is here placed the lowest; and one sees at once with what unfeigned humility he had joined the brethren, content to take the lowest place, not thinking himself meet to be called an apostle. Nor was it till he had been especially called and set apart for his own peculiar

work by the Holy Ghost, and ordained thereunto by his brethren, that we find him occupying the foremost place in these apostolic records.

It forms no part of my purpose in these domestic readings to enter on any of those topics which may be said more immediately to belong to the subject of Church government, or ecclesiastical regulations, and which are more or less distinctly implied in this book. I would rather call your attention to a doctrine which is most conclusively and unerringly laid down in this portion of the narrative of the appointment of Barnabas and Saul to a particular charge, and that doctrine is, the Personality of the Holy Ghost, or, as our Athanasian Creed expresses it, "There is one person of the Father, another of the Son, and another of the Holy Ghost." And, while its language distinctly affirms the Person, so His authority, ordering and appointing all things in His Church, as distinctly implies the Godhead of the Holy Ghost, as the same Creed goes on to state, "The Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Ghost is God." Can any language be plainer or more intelligible than that which is here used, "Separate Me," or, as the words more accurately may be taken,* "Come

* The particle δη, αφορισατε δη μοι, is omitted in our translation. It is, as Hoogeveen remarks, hortative—"*Separate adeo mihi*," as he translates it.

now, separate *unto Me* Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto *I have called them.*"

No doubt, the Holy Ghost, while He named the persons, named also the field in which they were first to labour; and there was great tenderness as well as wisdom in directing their first missionary steps to Cyprus. Of the three that left Antioch on this mission, two were intimately connected with that island—Barnabas was a native of it, and Mark's mother, sister to Barnabas, was the same, so that they both must have felt a deep interest in being privileged to carry the Gospel to a country where so many of their own connexions and relatives were living—and it might be their ministry would be the more welcome from these personal and family ties. As to Saul, though he had not yet written, "Henceforth know I no man after the flesh," yet we cannot doubt that when he set out to follow his Master whithersoever He should call him, he was prepared to surrender father and mother, and brother and sister, and kindred, yea, and life itself, for the Lord Jesus' sake, and, having put his hand to the plough, to go steadily and unflinchingly on, till he had finished his course.

SECTION LXIII.

CHAP. XIII. 6—12. *And when they had gone through the isle unto Paphos, they found a certain sorcerer, a false prophet, a Jew, whose name was Bar-jesus: which was with the deputy of the country, Sergius Paulus, a prudent man; who called for Barnabas and Saul, and desired to hear the word of God. But Elymas the sorcerer (for so is his name by interpretation) withstood them, seeking to turn away the deputy from the faith. Then Saul, (who also is called Paul,) filled with the Holy Ghost, set his eyes on him, and said, O full of subtilty and all mischief, thou child of the devil, thou enemy of all righteousness, wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord? And now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon thee, and thou shalt be blind, not seeing the sun for a season. And immediately there fell on him a mist and a darkness; and he went about seeking some to lead him by the hand. Then the deputy, when he saw what was done, believed, being astonished at the doctrine of the Lord.*

WE have no account of the proceedings of this missionary band at Cyprus, except that while they continued at Salamis, where they first landed, they preached the Word of God in the synagogues of the Jews, while John acted in the humbler capacity of subordinate assistant or attendant on his uncle and Saul. The next mention of their proceedings is at Paphos, so well known to every student of classic lore as the theme of licentious rites, and the supposed favourite abode of the heathen goddess Venus—but more

known to and associated in the mind of the Christian student with the first miracle wrought by the great Apostle of the Gentiles.

It was a lengthened journey in those days from Salamis to Paphos, from one extremity of the island to the other; and we can hardly suppose that during that journey of fully 100 miles, and occupying, no doubt, several days, neither Barnabas nor Saul scattered any seed as they passed along —that they closed their lips and withheld their hands from every word and work of love. It is recorded of our great circumnavigator of the globe, Captain Cook, that in his various voyages around the world, wherever he landed on an unknown and yet untrodden shore—untrodden of civilized man, or altogether uninhabited—he dropped here and there, and in every favourable spot he passed, some of those precious seeds of fruit and grain and vegetable which he had brought with him from his own shores: and years afterwards future voyagers were surprised to find the growth of their own soil, the produce of their own fields and gardens, in these distant and untilled lands. Perhaps, somewhat in the same way, and in the same faith and hope, Barnabas and Saul dropped their far more precious seed, here a little and there a little, into this heart and that heart, beneath this roof and at this household altar, as they passed along. And, as God's sun and God's dews and rain ripened and preserved the material

seed without man's further care, so, I think, the Lord's great harvest-day will disclose some goodly sheaves of missionary produce during these few days' travel from Salamis to Paphos. We read afterwards of one Mnason, of Cyprus, at Jerusalem, with whom Paul and his company took up their abode on a later visit to that city, and it may be that he was one of those who "owed even their own self" to Paul's preaching, and, like Philemon, was glad to repay in some small degree the debt he owed by "preparing a lodging" for the Apostle.

It was, however, at Paphos that the great victory of the Gospel on the shores of Cyprus was to be won. Not many noble were to be called; and yet, had there been none of that class, it would have been urged as a reproach, and as a proof of its incapacity to meet other cases than those of the lowest and least educated. "Have any of the rulers or of the Pharisees believed on Him?" was the sarcasm levelled at Jesus. But it was not always so. We know that even members of the Sanhedrim, Joseph and Nicodemus, were believers in Christ while He was on earth, and, since we began this book, we have read that a great company of Jewish priests became obedient to the faith—that an officer of high authority in the Court of Queen Candace was converted—that Cornelius, a Roman centurion of rank and illustrious family, was especially called—and even in

this chapter we have the name of one who was foster-child with Herod Antipas, and now we come to one of still higher rank and station than any, even the Roman Governor or Proconsul of the island, Sergius Paulus.

And yet with him were hindrances, which, at the first blush, seem inconsistent with his character of prudence and intelligence. We read that Barnabas and Saul found at Paphos, and in much repute both with the Proconsul and the people, a certain "sorcerer." Our translation is an unhappy one, and hardly gives one any idea of the power and influence and sway which such characters possessed and exercised. We have already come in contact with one at Samaria, "to whom all the people gave heed from the least to the greatest," Simon Magus: and some of you will, no doubt, recall to mind the many passages in ancient writers which tell how such characters swarmed, and found admission into every circle, from the palace of the Roman Emperor himself to the gipsy-beggar on the Milvian Bridge. In our own mediæval annals, also, astrologers formed a very influential class, and in many an instance blended the trade of the poisoner with the profession of the "sorcerer" and star-gazer. One might almost, perhaps, be tempted to smile at the thought how little, in these matters at least, times have changed since the days of this Magus of Cyprus—his own name was Bar-jesus, or son

of Jesus or Joshua—but, either assumed by himself or bestowed by others, he was more generally known by the name of Elymas, an Arabic word, meaning 'the Wise Man,' or, as we might almost literally translate it, 'the Cunning Man.'

Like his contemporary and, perhaps, countryman, Simon Magus, he met his punishment in his sin; but, unlike Simon, we read of no entreaty for the prayer of the Apostle to God, on his behalf, that the thought and purpose of his heart might be forgiven him. And one must fear that that thick film and mist of darkness which fell upon his eyes, fell on his heart also, and indicated that blackness of darkness for ever, of which the Apostle Jude speaks. And yet how vast the compassion and the tender mercy which made that difference between Sergius Paulus and Elymas—the one foaming out his own shame, the other plucked out of the fire, a monument of God's grace for evermore! And it is a very striking and important remark which Joseph Milner makes on the expression that "the Deputy, when he saw what was done, believed, being astonished at the doctrine of the Lord:"—"A mere historical believer," he says, "would have been astonished at the miracle merely; Sergius Paulus, a true convert, who entered into the holy nature of the Gospel by a spiritual perception, *is astonished at the doctrine.*"

SECTION LXIV.

CHAP. XIII. 13. *Now when Paul and his company loosed from Paphos, they came to Perga in Pamphylia: and John departing from them returned to Jerusalem.*

YOU will observe that from this time we part company with "the young man *Saul*," whom we first met on that memorable and melancholy day of Stephen's martyrdom; and henceforward we travel on our future course with the Apostle *Paul*.

A good many conjectures have been made as to the reasons and the time of this change of name. It is in reality of very little importance; and, in all probability, as with many others of his countrymen, and as with his present companion, Barnabas, who was also called Joses or Joseph, Paul may have had from the very period of his birth, or certainly of his childhood, the two names of Saul and Paul, which, though so very dissimilar in meaning and origin, are, at least to our ears, so similar in sound. Saul was, as you remember, the name of the first King of Israel, and, no doubt, his memory was ever held in honour by his tribe, from age to age, as one who had died in battle against the enemies of his country on the mountains of Gilboa, and whose death had been recorded in elegy by the sweet "Psalmist of Israel." Now, this Jewish child at Tarsus, of the

same tribe and lineage, received the still honoured name of Israel's first monarch.

The name Paulus was a Roman name, of a high and noble family, who had signalized their heroism and valour on many a field of battle; but the signification of the word was "*little*," and it may have been originally given to some member of the Paulian family from his diminutive stature, as one knows that personal defects often affixed a name to individuals in those earlier as in later days.* And in that household at Tarsus the name of Paulus might have been adopted from a very early period, at first as a term of affectionate endearment by the various members of a family towards the little child, and afterwards continued as an appropriate cognomen to one who was a free-born citizen of Rome.

No doubt at Jerusalem and among his own countrymen his Israelitish name would be alone adopted and known; but now that he is especially selected for the mission to the Gentiles, the Latin name seems to have gradually displaced the other, and at last to have been universally adopted. To us—to the whole Christian world—the name of Paul will be held in everlasting remembrance, and it is of little moment to us, why or when he

* Ovidius *Naso*, and Marcus Tullius *Cicero* will at once recur to the classical reader, and Hairoun *Al-Raschid*, or the Red-head, and our own William *Rufus* of more recent times.

was first called that name—to us it is a name not only of affectionate endearment, but of holiest reverence,—familiar as a household word, and yet sacred as "an everlasting name that shall not be cut off."

It would appear that the missionary work of Paul and Barnabas at Cyprus was ended with the conversion of the Roman proconsul Sergius Paulus; and that these Apostles, still accompanied by Mark, shortly quitted its shores on a far more distant and perilous mission, now known and quoted as St. Paul's first journey. In writing to the Corinthians (2 Cor. xi. 26) he mentions among the many perils and hazards of his life, that he was "in journeyings often, in perils of waters, and in perils of robbers, in perils by his own countrymen, and in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, and in perils among false brethren;" and I think we may see most of these realized and encountered in this most perilous journey.

And though one mourns over, yet perhaps one is hardly justified at this distant day, when reasons and motives and concurring circumstances are so slenderly and imperfectly known to us, nay, can only be matter of conjecture, to affix too severe a censure on Mark's withdrawal from the work, ere he had fairly made trial of a single hardship. The visit to Cyprus must have been altogether one of interest and affection, among the friends

and relations of his mother and his uncle; but now privations and perils, persecutions and hardships of every kind were henceforth to be the companions of their pilgrimage amid the swollen torrents and the robber hordes in their route from Perga to Pisidia. One sees, however, in this incident, how full of tender caution and wisdom was the reply of Jesus to one who, ere he fully cast in his lot with the Saviour, said, "Suffer me first to go and bid them farewell which are at home at my house," and Jesus answered, "No man having put his hand to the plough and looking back is fit for the kingdom of God." Mark's heart was evidently at Jerusalem; nor had he counted fully the cost of all he was to give up, and his courage quailed before the perils of enterprise on which Paul and Barnabas were bound.

It is evident that Paul felt his conduct deeply, and perhaps the more deeply at the very outset of his work: and I think we see traces in the after history that at first he resented it more deeply than was consistent with his own loving spirit or his own after-feeling. And it may have been with reference to and in recollection of his own harshness on this occasion, that he afterwards so gently counselled others, "Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual restore such an one in the spirit of meekness, considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted." At any rate the lesson remains to ourselves, that when-

ever duty calls, wherever the Lord's work summons, and whatever the Lord's Word enjoins, we must be prepared to "endure hardness as a good soldier of Christ," and must not suffer even our natural affection, or the ties of kindred, or the impulses of our own hearts, or the suggestions of our own interest, to come into competition with, or jostle out of sight the paramount obligations of God's Word and will.

SECTION LXV.

CHAP. XIII. 14—39. *But when they departed from Perga, they came to Antioch in Pisidia, and went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and sat down. And after the reading of the law and the prophets the rulers of the synagogue sent unto them, saying, Ye men and brethren, if ye have any word of exhortation for the people, say on. Then Paul stood up, and beckoning with his hand said, Men of Israel, and ye that fear God, give audience. The God of this people of Israel chose our fathers, and exalted the people when they dwelt as strangers in the land of Egypt, and with an high arm brought he them out of it. And about the time of forty years suffered he their manners in the wilderness. And when he had destroyed seven nations in the land of Chanaan, he divided their land to them by lot. And after that he gave unto them judges about the space of four hundred and fifty years, until Samuel the prophet. And afterward they desired a king: and God gave unto them Saul the son of Cis, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, by the space of forty years.*

And when he had removed him, he raised up unto them David to be their king; to whom also he gave testimony and said, I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after mine own heart, which shall fulfil all my will. Of this man's seed hath God according to his promise raised unto Israel, a Saviour, Jesus: when John had first preached before his coming the baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel. And as John fulfilled his course, he said, Whom think ye that I am? I am not he. But, behold, there cometh one after me, whose shoes of his feet I am not worthy to loose. Men and brethren, children of the stock of Abraham, and whosoever among you feareth God, to you is the word of this salvation sent. For they that dwell at Jerusalem, and their rulers, because they knew him not, nor yet the voices of the prophets which are read every sabbath-day, they have fulfilled them in condemning him. And though they found no cause of death in him, yet desired they Pilate that he should be slain. And when they had fulfilled all that was written of him, they took him down from the tree, and laid him in a sepulchre. But God raised him from the dead: and he was seen many days of them which came up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are his witnesses unto the people. And we declare unto you glad tidings, how that the promise which was made unto the fathers, God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children, in that he hath raised up Jesus again; as it is also written in the second psalm, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee. And as concerning that he raised him up from the dead, now no more to return to corruption, he said on this wise, I will give you the sure mercies of David. Wherefore he saith also in another psalm, Thou shalt not suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. For David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell on sleep, and was laid unto his fathers, and saw corruption: but he, whom God raised again, saw no corruption. Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through

this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins: and by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses.

I DO not profess in these domestic readings to enter at all into the geographical any more than the chronological questions which continually meet and perplex us in these Acts of the Apostles; but it will certainly add to our interest in their perusal if we keep in mind the general bearings of Paul's route in his various wanderings. We have already seen that Paul and Barnabas, accompanied by Mark, had left Cyprus in some vessel from Paphos for the opposite shores of Pamphylia, and, landing in the bay of Attaleia, had proceeded to Perga, about 16 miles further north,* where Mark parted company from them and retraced his steps to Jerusalem. Paul and Barnabas appear to have made no stay of any consequence at Perga during this visit, but immediately set out on their northward journey to Antioch in Pisidia, through a country interesting to the classical reader as connected with Xenophon's memorable retreat of the "Ten Thousand," and now still more interesting to the Scripture student as the scene of Paul's earliest missionary labours. One glance at the map will show you the relative position of Antioch in Syria, the starting-point of Paul's journey, to Antioch in

* I have taken the distances from Lewin's very valuable work on "The Life and Epistles of St. Paul."

Pisidia, where we now find him on the Jewish Sabbath-day in one of the synagogues addressing the assembled and expectant meeting both of Jews and proselytes of the Gentiles.

The scene described is much the same as that which took place in the synagogue at Nazareth on our Lord's visit there, and indeed in every other Jewish place of worship. The Law and the Prophets were first duly read by the appointed minister, and then the ruler of the synagogue invited Paul and Barnabas, whose coming and purpose had probably been previously signified to him, if they had any word of exhortation, to address the congregation. We can almost picture to ourselves the Apostle on this occasion standing up before the people, while their eyes would be intently fixed on him and his companion by his side, and then waving his hand to bespeak their more earnest attention, commence his discourse.

It has been suggested that there is great similarity in the line of argument pursued by Paul in this discourse to that which was delivered by Peter at Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost. It has often struck me that there is more resemblance to the defence made by Stephen before the Sanhedrim on the day of his martyrdom, and which Paul himself undoubtedly heard. At the time, indeed, it might be said to have made but little impression, beyond that of stirring him up to more infuriated rancour against the speaker; and

yet the arrow from God's bow had even then sped, and though for a time unconscious of its wound, Paul still carried the rankling memory of those truths with him, till in the Lord's own time they were brought home with saving efficacy to his own heart, and, recognizing their healing power in his own soul, he was anxious to comfort others by the same comfort wherewith he himself had been comforted of God. Such is the difference between a prepared and an unprepared soil—between truth to a converted, and the same truth to an unconverted heart: as Paul himself afterwards so feelingly and experimentally declares of the Gospel he preached, that while it was a savour of life unto life in them that were saved, it was also a savour of death unto death in them that perish.

There was something most solemn in the salutation with which the Apostle first addresses them, "Men of Israel, and ye that fear God;" nor was there anything in this introductory part of his discourse that was in any measure calculated to excite an angry or impatient feeling in either portion of his audience. He just glances at the call of God to their fathers, and their deliverance from the land of Egypt: he reminds them of the patient and tender long-suffering of God towards them during their wanderings in the wilderness, bearing them, as it were, in his arms, as a tender nurse doth her child. Then rapidly

hurrying on through their settlement in the promised land and the period of their judges, and just giving one word of record, one natural testimony, of a Benjamite's loving memory to Israel's first king, "a man of Benjamin," he hastens to that predicted seed of David, even Jesus, whom God, according to His promise, had raised as a Saviour unto Israel, and whose coming had been so especially inaugurated by the pointing of the Baptist to him that should come after him. It was true the rulers at Jerusalem had rejected Him, and with wicked hands had crucified and slain Him, because they read not their own Scriptures nor their prophets aright. But God had raised Him from the dead, and ere He had been scarcely laid in the grave, ere corruption or decay had laid one touch or taint upon Him, as their own holy Psalmist had declared, God had set His own seal upon Him by raising Him from the dead, thus remembering His mercy and truth towards the house of Israel. And as His witnesses are now proclaiming these glad tidings to the people at Jerusalem, so are we come hither to announce God's gracious purpose that all the ends of the earth may see the salvation of our God. "The law and the prophets were until John," but since that time the kingdom of God is preached far and wide, that every man may press into it. Now, that which is in part shall be done away, because that which is perfect is

come: the law has now fulfilled its mission as a schoolmaster to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith; and by Him, even by Jesus Christ, all that believe are justified from all things from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses.

So early, so emphatically does Paul set forth that great fundamental doctrine of the Gospel, which it was his mission and his glory to preach, even justification by faith, that "most wholesome doctrine," as our Article expresses it, and so "very full of comfort."

SECTION LXVI.

CHAP. XIII. 40—50. *Beware therefore, lest that come upon you which is spoken of in the prophets; behold, ye despisers, and wonder, and perish: for I work a work in your days, a work which ye shall in no wise believe, though a man declare it unto you. And when the Jews were gone out of the synagogue, the Gentiles besought that these words might be preached to them the next Sabbath. Now, when the congregation was broken up, many of the Jews and religious proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas; who, speaking to them, persuaded them to continue in the grace of God. And the next Sabbath-day came almost the whole city together to hear the word of God. But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy, and spake against those things which were spoken by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming. Then Paul and*

Barnabas waxed bold, and said, It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles: for so hath the Lord commanded us, saying, I have set thee to be a light of the Gentiles, that thou shouldest be for salvation unto the ends of the earth. And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord: and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed. And the word of the Lord was published throughout all the region. But the Jews stirred up the devout and honourable women, and the chief men of the city, and raised persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them out of their coasts.

I THINK there is a very valuable lesson for ourselves to learn in this demeanour of a large portion of the congregation at the close of Paul's discourse in this Pisidian synagogue. It is not mentioned that there was any expression of disapprobation, and certainly we may say no disturbance, while Paul was speaking. He might, however, as had been the case with Stephen, have seen indications of that restless impatience and increasing displeasure in the features and gestures of the Jewish members of the assembly, and have hastened on to close his sermon by that powerful and close and solemn application of it to the consciences of all who heard him.

The congregation, like our own assemblies at the present day, was evidently of a mixed character; some, on whom the preacher's words fell

heedless and unawakening, and others into whose hearts they entered and stirred up a spirit of earnest and faithful inquiry. Most of the Jews it would seem quitted the synagogue with apparent indifference and unconcern, or if they noticed what had been spoken, it was more probably to criticise and find fault and express contempt. But it was not so with all—there were those who had heard and longed to hear again—those to whom the words of Paul were indeed glad tidings of great joy, who received the Word gladly, and with affectionate earnestness entreated to be taught again.

It is an interesting scene which this portion of the chapter brings before our minds: the congregation indeed broke up—the House of God poured forth its numbers, who had joined in the service of the day, and those walls which had resounded to the stirring accents of an Apostle's eloquence, were now once more mute and tenantless. But whither did these earnest hearers of the Word betake themselves at the close? Did they hurry back to their homes to dissipate their thoughts there, or loiter on the way to join with idle neighbours in ignorant cavil on the doctrine they had heard, or in unseemly scoffing at the preacher? Oh, no! it was far otherwise. With the words of Paul still sounding in their ears, and the glow of holy love still burning in their hearts, they followed Paul and his companion home-

wards, who speaking to them exhorted and persuaded them to continue in the grace of God.

I cannot but think that the Holy Spirit, who has deigned to record this incident, meant to lead us to imitate the example of these Pisidian proselytes, if not literally to follow our minister to his home, and there renew the theme, at least to copy the earnest desire they evinced that what we have heard in the House of God should abide with us, and bring forth fruit unto salvation, that it should not be suffered to evaporate in engagements and pursuits unbefitting the solemnities in which we have been engaged, and that God's day should be exclusively devoted to God.

It is, indeed, a strange and sad anomaly, and only to be accounted for by the natural corruption of the human heart, and its disinclination to holy things, that religious impressions, unless savingly brought home to our souls by the Holy Spirit, are so short-lived, and that to many, in every congregation, the beautiful service of our Church is only a sealed volume and a dead letter, its touching confessions of sin and unworthiness awaken no responding throb in our bosoms, its notes of praise strike not a single chord, its prayers for ourselves produce no sense of our dependence, its prayers for others no charity to our kind.

And yet this very opposition of the Jews, sinful and destructive as it was to their own souls,

was only working out the purpose of God as regarded the future mission and labours of his Apostle. It is a striking expression which is here used with regard to the feelings which actuated these Jews. It was not so much the doctrine which Paul preached of a crucified Saviour that stirred up this wrath and opposition, but it was *envy*—that miserable passion rankling in their hearts, and corroding every blessing into a curse, which could not bear to see the Gentile raised to a spiritual equality with themselves, and which instead of rejoicing at the success which was evidently blessing the Lord's work in their city, and welcoming every convert as a brother, and esteeming those who preached Jesus unto them very highly in love for their work's sake, could find no rest, till by their persecutions and cabals they had driven them out of their coasts. One laments to find joining in this outcry "devout and honourable women:" they had no doubt a zeal for God, the very epithet of 'devout' implies it, but not according to knowledge; and their earnest impassioned hearts too ready to receive the impression of the moment. Yet in general we find women among the sincerest and warmest advocates of the Gospel; and God has left on record many a testimony to woman's love, and woman's faith; and Paul's own Epistles gratefully testify to the affectionate devotedness of many a sister in the Lord.

SECTION LXVII.

CHAP. XIII. 51, 52; XIV. 1—7. *But they shook off the dust of their feet against them, and came unto Iconium. And the disciples were filled with joy, and with the Holy Ghost. And it came to pass in Iconium, that they went both together into the synagogue of the Jews, and so spake, that a great multitude both of the Jews and also of the Greeks believed. But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles, and made their minds evil affected against the brethren. Long time therefore abode they speaking boldly in the Lord, which gave testimony unto the word of his grace, and granted signs and wonders to be done by their hands. But the multitude of the city was divided: and part held with the Jews, and part with the apostles. And when there was an assault made both of the Gentiles, and also of the Jews, with their rulers, to use them despitefully, and to stone them, they were ware of it, and fled unto Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia, and unto the region that lieth round about: and there they preached the Gospel.*

IT is a remarkable testimony to the abiding influence of the apostles' preaching at Antioch, and of that efficacy and demonstration of the Spirit which had accompanied their labours, that notwithstanding the success of the persecutions raised against their teachers, and their expulsion from the city, the disciples whom they left behind, those proselytes of the Gentiles, the very persons who on the first Sabbath had followed Paul and Barnabas to their home, and whom they had so

affectionately urged and "persuaded them to continue in the grace of God," these very disciples are represented as filled with joy and the Holy Ghost. How assuredly were Paul's after words verified, that "the kingdom of God is not meat and drink," is not dependant on human teachers and instructors, and the presence of earthly guides and stays, but is "righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost." We shall find, ere we close this present chapter, how the hearts of these holy men of God yearned after these their sons in the faith, and how speedily they returned in spite of previous perils, to confirm and strengthen the work which had been begun. At present we find that according to the emphatic and symbolical injunction of their Lord, having shaken off the dust of their feet against Antioch, they proceeded to Iconium, a town about sixty miles in a south-easterly direction from Antioch, and beyond the jurisdiction and territory of Pisidia.

I think we may see in every action of Paul's life, and in every step of his missionary labours, how uppermost and ever-gushing forth was that strong affection and earnest yearning after his own countrymen which he so affectionately mentions in his Epistle to the Romans, (Chap. ix. 1,) "Brethren! my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they might be saved"—nay, that he could almost gladly for their sakes

surrender every hope of earthly happiness and peace, and even be separated from all communion with Christ and His people on earth, if by so doing he could win his brethren to Christ. They were Jews who had stirred up all the opposition and persecution against them which they had met with at Antioch, and they had been compelled to seek safety in flight from these "perils by their own countrymen;" and yet here, at Iconium, the very first act we read of is that "they went both together into the synagogue of the Jews;" and with the same persuasive earnestness, the same convincing arguments so preached, that "a great multitude both of Jews and also of the Greeks believed."

And yet at Iconium, as at Antioch, the same scene occurred, only with greater rancour, and still more premeditated outrage. We can hardly realize, as we sit here calmly and quietly listening to the narrative, the amount of faith and love and sufferance which must have borne these earlier preachers of the Gospel above the insults and mockings, privations and cruelties and outrages which awaited them in every place, and yet left their zeal unquenched, their love undiminished one jot or tittle, and their readiness to suffer and labour on as sincere and fervent as when they first put their hands to the plough. Paul indeed gives us a touching hint of the weapons wherewith they repelled these fiery

darts of the adversaries, "Being reviled," he says, "we bless; being persecuted, we suffer it; being defamed, we entreat." It was with them, as with the Psalmist in days of old, "I have heard the blasphemy of the multitude, and fear is on every side, while they conspire together against me, and take their counsel to take away my life."

"Their times, too, were in God's hands;" and though a plot was laid against their lives by certain Jews to stone them, yet, through the providence of God, the design became known, and was communicated to the Apostles. Being persecuted in one city, they fled to another; and as from Antioch they were driven forth to Iconium, so now from Iconium they were compelled to flee into another district, to Lystra, a city of Lycaonia, about forty miles to the south of Iconium.

No Agabus had as yet fallen in with Paul, and with symbolical action represented to him the bonds and imprisonment that awaited him in an after-journey; but from the very first his Saviour had shown him what great things he must suffer for His name's sake, and even then no doubt the Holy Ghost had already witnessed to him that in every city bonds and afflictions abided him. And how strikingly was this made clear to him in this his first missionary journey. He had been driven from Antioch by persecution, but unaccompanied

by personal violence; from Iconium he was obliged to flee a threatened stoning, and at Lystra the very outrage he fled from met him. But none of these things moved him from his stedfast purpose, his appointed mission to preach the Gospel whithersoever he went; and we therefore wonder not that it is added here, that as soon as they reached Lystra, there "they preached the Gospel."

Yet, no doubt, Iconium had in many a converted one to rejoice in the coming of these Apostles; and without going to the fabled legends of the Church of Rome * for evidence of Paul's ministry while there, we may be content with that testimony which the Holy Spirit Himself has given "to the Word of His grace," and the power by which His servants wrought, "that a great multitude both of the Jews and also of the Greeks believed," and that "the Lord gave testimony unto the words of his grace, and

* I allude to "The Legend of St. Thecla of Iconium," which occupies so conspicuous a place in Roman Catholic annals, and who is also mentioned by several of the Fathers, especially of the fourth century. But though from such concurrent testimony we may give credit to the fact that an individual of that name did live and was perhaps a Christian, there is not a tittle of evidence that she lived in St. Paul's time, or was converted by his preaching; and her after adventures are too evidently cast in the mould of Rome's legendary saint-lore, to deserve one moment's hesitation in rejecting the whole story.

granted signs and wonders to be done by their hands."

SECTION LXVIII.

CHAP. XIV. 8—18. *And there sat a certain man at Lystra, impotent in his feet, being a cripple from his mother's womb, who never had walked: The same heard Paul speak: who stedfastly beholding him, and perceiving that he had faith to be healed, said with a loud voice, Stand upright on thy feet. And he leaped and walked. And when the people saw what Paul had done, they lifted up their voices, saying in the speech of Lycaonia, The gods are come down to us in the likeness of men. And they called Barnabas, Jupiter; and Paul, Mercurius, because he was the chief speaker. Then the priest of Jupiter, which was before their city, brought oxen and garlands unto the gates, and would have done sacrifice with the people. Which, when the apostles, Barnabas and Paul, heard of, they rent their clothes, and ran in among the people, crying out, and saying, Sirs, why do ye these things? We also are men of like passions with you, and preach unto you that ye should turn from these vanities unto the living God, which made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all things that are therein: who in times past suffered all nations to walk in their own ways. Nevertheless he left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness. And with these sayings scarce restrained they the people, that they had not done sacrifice unto them.*

We cannot, indeed, say with the Psalmist of these cities, which Paul here visited, that "their

memorial also is perished with them," for Perga, and Antioch, and Iconium, and Lystra, and Derbe are still remembered, and will be held in everlasting remembrance, wherever the Word of God finds its way, or the Bible is known. And yet there is something saddening—God forbid that I should say prophetic—but at least there is something that lifts up a warning voice to ourselves in the fact that of these cities and towns where Paul and Barnabas preached and laboured, not one remains, save Iconium, which, under its modern name of Cogni, or Konieh, in its site at least still preserves some remembrance of the scene of the Apostle's labours of love among them. Of Perga and Antioch, till very recent discoveries of modern travellers, not even the site was known, and Lystra and Derbe are altogether untraced as yet.

And yet the name of Jesus was heard in their streets, and in their synagogues many wonderful works were done in and by that name, and a great multitude converted to the faith. It is a melancholy coincidence that Paul himself, when retracing at the close of life all that had befallen him during his eventful career, and going back to this first missionary journey, records once more with singular minuteness "the persecutions and afflictions which came unto me at Antioch, and Iconium, and Lystra, and Derbe"; and with

what a burst of pathos does he repeat, "What persecutions I endured!" and yet how gratefully he adds, "but the Lord delivered me out of them all." (2 Tim. iii. 11.) So that even the Apostle's own record of those days tells but of trouble and of suffering as of an evil-doer.

I have already alluded to his own detail of sufferings in his Epistle to the Corinthians, as especially in some portions of it referring to this very journey; and though the historian here recounts quite enough to show that the Apostle's more minute enumeration is in no degree overcharged, yet it is evidently the purpose of the Holy Spirit, by whose inspiration Luke wrote, to mark out in these annals the progress of the Gospel, its hindrances as well as its triumphs, rather than the sufferings of the missionary or his hardships by the way, except as far as they are indicative of the Lord's method of scattering the Gospel seed, and gathering in a people unto Himself out of all nations under heaven.

We shall hardly enter into this scene at Lystra unless we just take one glance at the character of the city and its inhabitants. We do not read of any synagogue of the Jews in this place, though we read a chapter or two on, that one youth of Jewish extraction, at least by the mother's side, was residing there, and probably at the time of this very visit. But Lystra appears to have been

altogether in the very depths and darkness of heathen superstition, retaining even to that day the fables and legends of their ancient mythology, how in ages past Jupiter and Mercury had once come down among them in human guise, and being treated with inhospitality had resented it with signal punishment. We know not where Paul preached to the Lystrians, nor where this cripple sate—no doubt in some public place of resort, where his condition might attract sympathy and notice; and, therefore, probably at the gates or vestibule of that temple of Jupiter which was before the city. And on that same spot, or immediately contiguous to it, would I represent this whole scene as taking place, the healing of this cripple, the astonishment and acclamations of the people who once more declared that Jupiter and Mercury had come down to their city in human form, and performed this miracle of mercy. And then, hearing these shouts, and understanding from what cause they arose, the priests of Jupiter, with their servants and acolytes, issued forth from the temple with their oxen already decked for sacrifice, and in their ignorance and enthusiasm would have offered them unto Paul and Barnabas as their actual Deities. At the first, as the people in their excitement spoke in the Lycaonian dialect, which the Apostles did not understand, they were not aware of the blasphemy; but on seeing these

unmistakeable evidences of their purpose, they rushed in * among the people, and by earnest entreaties and disclaimers, by forcible reasoning and appeals to their common sense, at length succeeded, though with much difficulty, in restraining their idolatrous design.

I would now call your attention for a moment to Paul's address to this cripple, as we find it recorded in our Bibles, "Stand up on thy feet." Assuredly, there is no mention of the Saviour's name here, as in the parallel case of Peter, "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk." †; and for aught that the words conveyed of meaning to the Lycaonian mind, one can hardly be surprised that they should have taken them in their literal construction, and believed that "by their own power and holiness they had made this man whole." I do not say

* In this view of the transaction we have no need to change the word in our Greek version from εἰσεπήδησαν into ἐξεπήδησαν, as some manuscripts propose, on the supposition that Paul and Barnabas had returned to their own house, and that the sacrificial procession had followed them there, and already reached the doors (πυλῶνες) of the house where they were. I cannot but agree with Dr. Owen that (πυλῶνες) refers to the folding gates or doors of the temple.

† Some MSS. have the words, "I say unto thee, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, stand up on thy feet;" but one cannot help thinking that these writers have felt the omission, and endeavoured to rectify it by the insertion of these words.

that the Apostle meant for one moment to assume such a power, or ever dreamed of such an inference as these ignorant idolaters drew from the miracle: but I think he spoke "unadvisedly with his lips," with something perhaps akin to that spirit with which Moses struck the rock in Horeb, "Must we fetch you water out of this rock?" and that it was not till the unmistakeable evidence of their erroneous conclusion from his words, that he saw his inadvertency and sin in its full light.

SECTION LXIX.

CHAP. XIV. 19—28. *And there came thither certain Jews from Antioch and Iconium, who persuaded the people; and, having stoned Paul, drew him out of the city, supposing he had been dead. Howbeit, as the disciples stood round about him, he rose up, and came into the city: and the next day he departed with Barnabas to Derbe. And when they had preached the gospel to that city, and had taught many, they returned again to Lystra, and to Iconium, and Antioch, confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God. And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed. And after they had passed throughout Pisidia, they came to Pamphylia. And when they had preached the word in Perga, they went down into Attalia; and thence sailed to Antioch, from whence they had been recommended to the*

grace of God for the work which they fulfilled. And when they were come, and had gathered the church together, they rehearsed all that God had done with them, and how he had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles. And there they abode long time with the disciples.

LET us go back for a moment or two to Jerusalem, and recall to mind a scene which occurred only a few years before this which we have now read of at Lystra: how its streets resounded with acclamations of "Hosanna! Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!" and how the thronging crowds took off their very garments and strewed them in the pathway of Him who was entering their city, and hailed Him, if not as a God in the likeness of man, yet at least as their predicted and honoured King. And yet ere that week was closed—within four days only—the same streets resounded with far different cries, "Crucify him, crucify him!" and He who had so entered Jerusalem, toiled up the steep of Calvary with furrowed back and bleeding brow, and was taken down from the cross, in very truth dead!

The disciple is not above his Master; and we wonder not that in the same streets, where they would have worshipped Paul as a God, they soon stoned him as a malefactor. And yet fickle and faithless as the Lycaonians are historically described to have been, I would to a certain

extent exonerate them from the guilt of this act, and ascribe it far more justly to the deep malignity and hatred of Paul's Jewish brethren. Jesus had once said of the Pharisees that "they would compass sea and land to make one proselyte" to their own bigoted creed and practice; and we have here a sad and painful illustration of the untiring energy of bigotry and hatred in the accomplishment of its hellish purposes. For some of these Jews scrupled not at a journey of more than 100 miles to wreak their malice on the man whom they deemed a renegade from the faith: and, like a snow-ball gathering increase in its progress, so they, enlisting fresh recruits as they passed through Iconium, hastened on to Lystra to gain that end which had failed both at Antioch and Iconium. It is evident that these Jews were not only the instigators, but the chief agents in the work, for stoning was altogether a Jewish punishment.

But why did God permit at Lystra that which He had undoubtedly prevented at Antioch and Iconium? Why did he suffer these Iconian Jews to come from their own city to effect that which they had not been allowed to accomplish at home? I think we may read the solution in Paul's previous inadvertency and error; and that he whose rash words had almost induced adoration of himself and companion as gods was allowed not only to be treated with indignity and insult, but to be stoned

as a criminal, and to be cast out as dead. "I have said, Ye are gods; but ye shall die like men." We do not read that Barnabas had taken any other part in the transaction than in his earnest efforts to stop the people in their idolatry; and on Barnabas no part of the punishment is permitted to fall—not a hair of his head was hurt.

There must have been much of mingled feeling and bitterness of retrospect in Paul's mind. He would recall the contrast of that day when these Lystrians shouted, 'The gods are come down to us in the likeness of men!'—but still more bitterly would he recall that day at Jerusalem in which he had been so deep and guilty a participator, and was then urging others on to do as these Jews were now doing to him, and he might have stammered forth, as he staggered and sunk beneath the blows, "As I have done, so God hath requited me." (Judges i. 7.)

Yet Paul's work was far from ended—the crown of martyrdom was not then woven that was to encircle his brow—he had still to experience in his own person, as well as teach others, "that through much tribulation he and they were to enter in the kingdom of God." And, therefore, though "the Lord chastened him sore, He had not given him over unto death." And we may just remark here that amid all the varied sufferings and cruelties, persecutions and trials that befell the Apostle in his after course, whether

from the heathen or from his own countrymen, this outrage of stoning was never repeated. "*Once* was I stoned"* is his own declaration; and though the Lord, in His wisdom and for His own inscrutable purposes, permitted it this once at Lystra, yet never before nor after was the Apostle to the Gentiles subjected to the Jewish punishment of stoning.

Though we need not suppose that these Jews had in reality stoned Paul to death, and may well believe that, though senseless, life still remained

* Paley admirably remarks on this clause that, "when confronted with the history, it furnishes the nearest approach to a contradiction without a contradiction being actually incurred, of any I remember to have met with. The history mentions distinctly one occasion upon which Paul was stoned, viz., at Lystra in Lycaonia. It mentions also another occasion in which 'an assault was made both of the Gentiles, and also of the Jews, with their rulers, to use them despitefully, and *to stone them*; but they were ware of it, and fled unto Lystra and Derbe.' This happened at Iconium. Now, had the assault been completed; had the history related that a stone was thrown, as it relates that preparations were made both by Jews and Gentiles to stone Paul and his companions; or even had the account of this transaction stopped without going on to inform us that Paul and his companions were 'aware of their danger, and fled,' a contradiction between the history and the epistle would have ensued. Truth is necessarily consistent, but it is scarcely possible that independent accounts, not having truth to guide them, should thus advance to the very brink of contradiction without falling into it."—Paley's "Horæ Paulinæ," chap. iv. 9.

in him, yet we must not overlook nor deny the miracle which restored him to such perfect strength and soundness that on the next day, unstopped by wound or bruise, he proceeded with Barnabas to Derbe, twenty miles from Lystra, and there at once resumed his usual practice of preaching the Gospel of Jesus to all who would listen—and we find that there were many who attended to the word gladly, and were taught of him.

It would seem that there was a lull from persecution, if not opposition in this city of Derbe. We are told nothing more of the results of this visit, than that "they taught many," or as the word more correctly signifies, "made many disciples." But whither from Derbe did Paul and Barnabas bend their steps? Had they been left to their own guidance and judgment, we can hardly doubt that Paul's natural feelings and affection would have led him to take the comparatively shorter course through the Cilician Pass or Gates to his own city of Tarsus, at no great distance off, where kindness and welcome would be more likely to await him, and where he had already preached the Gospel. At any rate, had we been called in to council with these holy men, we should, in all probability, have urged the rash indiscretion and danger, as well as uselessness, of going back to those cities, and so soon too, from which they had been so rudely expelled, and against one at

least of which they had already shaken off the dust of their feet. But it was not so—led by a more unerring guide than their own judgment, or affections, or fears, even by the Holy Spirit of God, they retraced every step of their way, through Lystra, where they had actually stoned Paul, through Iconium, where they had attempted it, and through Antioch whose inhabitants had "expelled them out of their coasts," and this they did, not stealthily nor hurriedly, but stopping in every place to "confirm the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith." At Perga they made a somewhat longer stay to preach that Gospel, which they had not done on their first visit, and then taking ship at Attalia, where they had originally landed on the Pamphylian coast, they returned to Antioch, in Syria, from whence they had originally set out, or as the history so emphatically tells us, from whence "they had been recommended to the grace of God for *the work which they had fulfilled.*" Happy the close of that journey, whatever were its perils and hardships by the way, of which the Spirit of God has left on record that its travellers had fulfilled the work for which they had been recommended to the grace of God! Happier still that one of these travellers at the close of life's long journey could say of his own long and eventful course, "I have finished my course," "I have fought a good fight," "I have kept the

faith," as his Saviour before had said of himself, "I have finished the work which Thou gavest me to do." Happy beyond expression are such testimonials of life's dying hours, "the Spirit itself bearing witness with our spirit!"

SECTION LXX.

CHAP. XV. 1—3. *And certain men which came down from Judæa taught the brethren, and said, Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved. When therefore Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question. And being brought on their way by the church, they passed through Phenice and Samaria, declaring the conversion of the Gentiles: and they caused great joy unto all the brethren.*

HITHERTO all the opposition and hindrance that the Gospel had met with had been from without, and at the hands of avowed enemies to the Christian faith. We now come to a far more fearful antagonism from within, and from those who were themselves actually believers in Christ, though, as Paul calls them, "false brethren," *

* Paul calls them παρεισάκτους ψευδαδέλφους, "false brethren unawares brought in," from which some have conjectured that they were unbelieving Jews. Probably, the

false to the privileges and liberty of their Christian brethren, with false and erroneous views of salvation, and endeavouring to mix up with the unsearchable riches of Christ the wood, hay, and stubble of their own ceremonial law.

We have already seen in the case of Cornelius with what jealous bitterness they animadverted on Peter's social intercourse with that baptized though uncircumcised Gentile; but still, they might think, that was a solitary case, and perhaps justified by the peculiar circumstances under which Peter had been called to act; and, they might hope, could hardly be established as a precedent for future conduct, far less for the indiscriminate and unrestricted admission of the Gentiles, save through the pale and door of the Jewish Church. One would not, perhaps, be inclined at the first view of the subject to speak with harshness of these objectors, with all their Jewish prejudices and predilections, the early associations of their education and training, the teaching of their law, and their social exclusiveness from every other nation under heaven. And yet one cannot but recognize in their dogmatic and dictatorial mode of laying down the law of their own opinions, a spirit very much at variance with that comprehensive love and charity which

falsehood consisted in pretending a commission from the Apostles, "to whom," as James says, "we gave no such commandment."

their new faith inculcated, "Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved." He must be a bold preacher who should presume to lay down such an uncompromising, unqualified dictum of exclusion from heaven, on a mere ceremonial point, and thus make the hearts of many sad and anxious, whom the Lord had not made sad, and unsettle that faith in Him, who had so emphatically declared of himself, that He was the Way—the only Way—the Truth, and the Life, and that no one could come unto the Father but by Him.

But in reality it was no mere ceremonial point. Had this doctrine been accepted at Antioch as binding on the Gentile community there—had Paul and Barnabas assented to its truth, and recommended its adoption—or had they suffered themselves, for the sake of peace and unanimity, to withdraw their opposition as from a point of little moment—then, indeed, would the Christian faith have been strangled even in its infancy—then would the deep foundations of Christian truth and doctrine have been utterly rooted up, and another Gospel preached, which would have been no Gospel of glad tidings—then, indeed, would all the preaching of Paul, and Barnabas, and Peter, and the rest of the Apostles, have been in vain, and men would have been still in their sins. One cannot doubt that the suggestion came from him who was the father of lies, and himself

a liar and a murderer from the beginning; and that even thus early he was striving to undermine and destroy that great fundamental doctrine of Justification by Faith, which, like Christ Himself, is the all in all of our Christian hope, the Beginning from which all springs, the End in which all terminates—'CHRIST UNTO SINNERS THE ALONE WAY OF SALVATION.'

It was too cunning a device of Satan to be easily thrown aside; it is too powerful an instrument in his hands for the destruction of souls to be hastily surrendered as a worn-out weapon; and, therefore, though this his first attempt was resisted and defeated by the energetic efforts of Paul and Barnabas, and the wisdom of the Jerusalem Council, under the especial guidance and direction of the Holy Ghost, yet unhappily a large portion of the Christian world are even now led captive by him at his will in the very same trammels with which he would have bound the Gentile world in Paul's time, and which that holy man of God, as Luther in later times, was so especially raised up to unrivet and break asunder.

No doubt, there would be much dissension and disputation in the Church at Antioch on so vital a question; and Paul felt it to be of such essential consequence even to the very existence as well as well-being of the Church that he declares of himself, when he afterwards detailed the circumstances in his Epistle to the Galatians, that

he would not yield one jot nor tittle—that he gave way, no, not for a single hour, in order, as he emphatically declares, that "*the truth of the Gospel* might continue with them." It was, indeed, God's truth—the Gospel's truth—the truth as it is in Jesus that was at stake; and, therefore, that there might be left on record a solemn and unerring decision of the Church on so momentous a point, it was resolved, by especial revelation from God to Paul himself, that he and Barnabas, accompanied by some others, should go up to Jerusalem and lay the question before the Apostles themselves, and receive their decision as binding on the whole Christian Church. The suggestion was cordially received by the disciples at Antioch, themselves so deeply interested in the matter; and accordingly Paul and Barnabas, the unflinching advocates of that great doctrine of Justification by Faith alone, accompanied by Titus, an uncircumcised Greek, and therefore a fitting representative of his class, were sent on their way with the earnest and anxious prayers of the Church at Antioch to the Church at Jerusalem. Paul, no doubt, might have settled the question by his own authority and power, as he was "not a whit behind the very chiefest of the Apostles;" but "it seemed good to the Holy Ghost," on so important a point, that no room for doubt should exist, and the journey was accordingly undertaken. And, as they passed onwards

through the well-known and well-trodden route of Phœnice, Galilee, and Samaria, they gave great joy, wherever they came, by declaring what great things God had wrought among the Gentiles—and now once more Paul traversed the streets of Jerusalem, fourteen years after that never-to-be-forgotten day when he left it with such different feelings, and on such a different mission, for Damascus.

SECTION LXXI.

CHAP. XV. 4—6. *And when they were come to Jerusalem, they were received of the church, and of the apostles and elders, and they declared all things that God had done with them. But there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed, saying, That it was needful to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses. And the apostles and elders came together for to consider of this matter.*

I HAVE already said that a considerable portion of Paul's life had passed since his journey to Damascus, and nearly twelve years had elapsed since his first visit to Jerusalem after his conversion to the Christian faith. *Then*, he was an object not only of hatred to his fellow-students and associates in the school of Gamaliel or the council of the Sanhedrim, but of suspicion and apprehension to those whose faith he had em-

braced. Then it was that Barnabas, finding him thus shunned by both parties, introduced him to Peter and James, and avouched for his sincerity and truth. It was this visit, which after a few days only was so painfully and abruptly terminated by threatened violence and assassination. There had been also a second visit, when Paul was the appointed messenger to convey the offerings of the Christians at Antioch to their poorer brethren in Jerusalem and Judæa during the pressure of a famine, of which we have no account, beyond the fact, in these sacred annals. And now we have this third visit, in which we have not only Luke's more copious narrative to guide us, but Paul's own account in his Epistle to the Galatians. We have chiefly to do with what is now told us.

But what a change had occurred since that first visit to Jerusalem: surely Paul might have adopted the language of their own Psalmist, and said, "I am as a Wonder unto many;" and in the eyes of many, no doubt, he was, as the margin of our translation has it, "a Monster unto many." *Then*, scarcely was the right hand of fellowship held out of any, and he was indebted to the kind interposition of Barnabas for admission among the brethren; *now*, he was the honoured and acknowledged associate and equal of Apostles, the unwearied missionary, the undaunted pioneer in the trackless wilderness of

heathen ignorance and darkness, the accredited messenger of the whole Gentile Church in defence of Christian liberty and truth, and to the result of whose present mission the whole Christian world to the end of time is deeply and vitally indebted.

We see in this demand of the Jewish party the insidious encroachment of error, the under-current by which it works its way and extends its lines. At Antioch the demand had been, "Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved,"—now that they had come to Jerusalem, the head-quarters of Jewish prejudice, and where they would find so many to uphold and advocate their opinions, they assume a bolder tone, and make a claim for the whole law of Moses, in all its burdensome rites and restrictions, to be imposed upon the Gentile neck. It now ran in these words, "It is needful to circumcise them, *and* to command them to keep the law of Moses"—that is, that the Gospel of Jesus Christ and faith in Him was not in itself sufficient for salvation without the additional props and buttresses of circumcision and the Mosaic ritual; or, in other words, that after the glorious edifice had been erected in all its magnificence and grandeur, the unsightly scaffolding, with its poles, and beams and ropes, was to remain as a needful appendage to the security and stability of the building.

It is of little importance by what name we call this meeting of the Christian Church—be it council,* or conclave, or convocation, or synod—it is undoubtedly and beyond all dispute the very first in all Christian annals; and we at this distant day, who are now reading the narrative of its proceedings, may look back with grateful interest on those discussions, which even then threatened to subvert the purity and integrity of our Christian faith, but which were so providentially overruled of God to the settlement of a question, against which the gates of hell have never yet prevailed—nor ever will.

It may, perhaps, however, be relevant to present times and present claims to give one glance at what we may call the constituency of this meeting, though we ourselves individually may have little to do with such a matter. Yet I think it meets us at the very first glance that the meeting was composed of the whole body

* Mosheim denies that this meeting of the Church at Jerusalem has any claim to the character or title of a council. "This meeting," he says, "was only of one Church, but everyone knows," he adds, "that a council is an assembly of deputies or commissioners sent from several Churches associated by certain bonds in a general body."

But surely he forgets that there were deputies from the Church at Antioch to the Church at Jerusalem, and that the decree was addressed to the Churches in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia; and as Paul and Silas passed through the various cities, "they delivered them the decrees for to keep."

of the Church, and not confined to the apostles and elders alone. We cannot doubt that the advocates of the Jewish side of the question were present to state and enforce their views, nor, I think, can we have less reason for believing that the deputation from Antioch, not merely Paul and Barnabas, but Titus also, himself an uncircumcised Greek, and the others who accompanied them, were also present, as well as numbers of the many Christians of Jerusalem, who now dared to profess the Christian name, and to meet together on points connected with their polity and well-being, very different from those earlier days, when the Apostles were forbidden to speak in the name of Jesus, and were scourged for doing so. We are expressly told that when Paul and Barnabas arose to address the assembly "all the multitude kept silence and gave audience" to them—a singular expression, if we confine the meeting to the apostles and elders, but significant enough if we take the words in their simple meaning. We are not, however, left to this expression only, for the result of their deliberations at the close of the meeting is authoritatively laid down as the decision of "the apostles and elders and the whole Church," * and till the expression of "the whole Church" is proved to be limited to its ordained ministers and appointed servants, I think we may without

* ἡ ὅλη ἐκκλήσια.

scruple consider it to embrace the whole company of believers; and, as such, look upon those who were now gathered together at Jerusalem as met to discuss and decide on a question alike important and essential to all and each.

SECTION LXXII.

CHAP. XV. 7—12. *And when there had been much disputing, Peter rose up, and said unto them, Men and brethren, ye know how that a good while ago God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the Gospel, and believe. And God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as he did unto us; and put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith. Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? but we believe that, through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, we shall be saved, even as they. Then all the multitude kept silence, and gave audience to Barnabas and Paul, declaring what miracles and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles by them.*

THERE is great propriety in Peter thus taking the lead in the discussion of this most vital question, inasmuch as it was by his mouth that the Lord had appointed that the Gentiles should first "hear the word of the Gospel, and believe." It was evidently from no other claim of superiority that Peter takes the precedence on

this occasion, for, according to the general tradition and belief of all ages, James, "the brother of the Lord," was the acknowledged president of the meeting, as well as head of the Church in Jerusalem. But Peter comes forward stating himself to be the one by whose instrumentality and hands the door of entrance into the Church had been first opened to the Gentiles; and who had himself witnessed such undoubted evidence of the Lord's acceptance of Cornelius and his household by "giving them the Holy Ghost, even as He had given unto Peter and the rest of the disciples, making no difference between them, and alike purifying their hearts by faith," that his own honest conviction was at once expressed in the emphatic words, "Can any man forbid water that these should not be baptized which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we?" and that, without a thought of, without the slightest mention or allusion to, the rite of circumcision, as necessary to salvation.

Peter's testimony is most valuable, because we know how unwillingly he admitted this truth—how "slow to believe" the purpose and predictions of God in this matter, and that a vision *thrice* repeated was vouchsafed from Heaven to open his eyes to the truth. Peter's testimony is not unlike that testimony of Isaac to the blessedness of Jacob, when he had unwittingly bestowed the blessing on Jacob instead of Esau, and at the

moment would have recalled his words and transferred it to his first-born Esau; yet, so irresistibly was the will of God in the appointment brought home to his mind, that in the very midst of his compunction, and sorrow, and resentment at his mistake, he arrests, as it were, his purpose, and exclaims "Yea, and he shall be blessed!" But Peter goes far beyond this; he not only declares that the Lord had made no distinction between Jews and Gentiles—he not only claims freedom for his Gentile brethren from the ritual of the Jewish law, but he distinctly and unhesitatingly declares of that law, with its additional burden of their own imposed traditions and oral law, that it was a yoke of bondage which neither they nor their fathers had been able to bear; and which, we cannot doubt, to the untutored Gentile just emerging from heathen practices, would be more intolerable and repulsive than even Pharaoh's bondage of brick had been to their fathers.

It is a striking expression which Peter here uses, conveying to us a startling sense of the deep guilt of these "false brethren:" "And now, why tempt ye God?" I think that those who so rashly seek to impose human fetters on Christian liberty, who would, if not substitute in the place of, at least add as necessary appendages to, salvation by Christ the weak and beggarly elements of their own miserable inventions, whereunto they

desire again to bring men to be in bondage—such, I say, would do well to remember how the inspired apostle characterizes such a proceeding, as well as our Lord's answer to Satan, "It is written, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God."

I have said that Titus was in all probability present at this assembly, and he must have listened with intense interest to the closing declaration of Peter's address, so delicately, so tenderly worded: "We believe that through the grace of God we shall be saved, even as they,"—as if the salvation of the Jew rather than the Gentile was in question, and that it was vouchsafed to the Jew as a privilege to be on the same footing with the Gentile. And when, in after years, Titus received from Paul, "as his own son in the common faith," that epistle which has been preserved as a precious legacy to the Church, with what grateful memory must he have recalled this declaration of Peter's in the council-room at Jerusalem, as he read the same truth in almost the same words, "The grace of God, which bringeth salvation, hath appeared to all men."

The addresses of Paul and Barnabas are not given—only their purport, that they simply confined themselves to a narrative of what God had wrought by their hands among the Gentiles, the miracles and wonders by which He had acknowledged and confirmed their work. It must have been a stirring narrative; and though *we* trace

the course of these missionary men more by the suffering they underwent and the outrages they endured, yet we read enough to know that God did not indeed leave that journey without witness, in that He gave to them multitudes of believers in every place, from the Proconsul of Cyprus to the poor cripple at Lystra, filling their hearts with joy and gladness. No address could possibly be more adapted to convince even an unwilling audience than such a simple detail of the Lord's approval and acceptance of their work, and of His gracious presence with them in every step of their way, "giving testimony unto the Word of His grace, and granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands." The conviction in every heart, as they listened, must have been like that of Nicodemus, that they were indeed teachers commissioned and sanctioned of God, for that no man could do what they had done unless God had been with them; and, as Jesus himself said to the unbelieving Jews, "The works that I do bear witness of me that the Father hath sent me."

It would seem that Peter's address, followed by those of Paul and Barnabas, had succeeded in convincing the assembly, or, at least that whatever of opposition still lurked in the minds of those Pharisaic Jews who had first stirred the question was no longer openly expressed, but reserved for other opportunities and more underhand channels; for it is this very same question

which we afterwards find undermining and corrupting the faith of the Galatian Church, and to which they had so unwittingly given heed, listening to the suggestions of those who not only sought to sow trouble and division among them, but who, as the Apostle emphatically declares, would "pervert the very Gospel of Christ."

SECTION LXXIII.

CHAP. XV. 13—29. *And after they had held their peace, James answered, saying, Men and brethren, hearken unto me: Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name. And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written, After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up: that the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles upon whom my name is called, saith the Lord, who doeth all these things. Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world. Wherefore my sentence is, that we trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles are turned to God: but that we write unto them, that they abstain from pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood. For Moses of old time hath in every city them that preach him, being read in the synagogues every sabbath day. Then pleased it the apostles and elders, with the whole church, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas; namely, Judas surnamed Barsabas, and Silas, chief men among the brethren:*

and they wrote letters by them after this manner: The apostles and elders and brethren send greeting unto the brethren which are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia: forasmuch as we have heard that certain which went out from us have troubled you with words, subverting your souls, saying, Ye must be circumcised, and keep the law: to whom we gave no such commandment: it seemed good unto us, being assembled with one accord, to send chosen men unto you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, men that have hazarded their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. We have sent therefore Judas and Silas, who shall also tell you the same things by mouth. For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things; that ye abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication: from which if ye keep yourselves, ye shall do well. Fare ye well.

JAMES, whom we have already mentioned as presiding over this council, concludes the proceedings by summing up the arguments that had been adduced, adding his own opinion by way of confirmation, and then laying before the assembly the decision to which he proposed they should come. Nor was it simply the opinion of Peter or of Paul, or Barnabas, or James; it is the united act of apostles and elders and the whole Church to give efficacy to the decree by appointing a deputation of their own body to accompany Paul and Barnabas back to Antioch, with letters for each of the Churches which these apostles had planted, stating in the simplest and plainest terms the decision at Jerusalem. Here, then, was a

definite and explicit rule laid down, and that, too, by an authority which could not be doubted, and an impartiality which could not be questioned, emanating from the very centre of Jewish prejudice and Mosaic predilection, and sealed and stamped with every circumstance that could give validity or sanction to its decree.

Nor let us forget the solemn preface with which the decree is headed—"It seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us." It is not the capricious decision of a self-constituted arbitrator, nor the solemn and judicial expression with which the Apostle James concludes his address—"Wherefore my sentence is."* A far higher sanction than that of man, even that of the Holy Ghost, is thus given to the decision. The fulness of time had come; Christ had fulfilled the law and the prophets, and by the one oblation of Himself had accomplished that which the law in its imperfectness was unable to do, and therefore, as St. Paul himself argues with the Galatians, "If there had been a law given which could have given life, then verily righteousness should have been by the law; but the Scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe,"—or, as he had so shortly before declared in the synagogue at Antioch in Pisidia, "By HIM all that believe are

* ἐγω κρινω.

justified from all things from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses."

Yet while with uncompromising fidelity this early Council of Jerusalem would not abate one jot nor tittle of that grand fundamental doctrine of Christian verity, Justification by Faith alone, yet there were certain things—the Holy Ghost calls them 'necessary things'—and I know not why we should pare down the meaning of God's language to support our own views and opinions, and suppose that, when the Holy Spirit declares these restrictions 'necessary things,' He only means necessary for that age, necessary for conciliation, as a politic concession to popular feeling, and therefore a merely temporary dispensation long since passed away. In one sense, it is true, 'pollutions of idols' may be no longer said to exist—'meats offered to idols' are no longer served up at Christian banquets and entertainments; but are there no pollutions of idolatry in the human heart at the present? Is covetousness no idolatry? is the world no idol? our affections no idol? and does not Paul speak of those who were "enemies to the cross of Christ, and whose god was their belly"? It is true, too, that in heathen worship licentious revelling and the most abominable impurities and pollutions formed no inconsiderable portion of their degraded rites—and we at once recognise, therefore, the necessity

of the second restriction at the very period. But is not the Word of God as binding on ourselves? is not the Seventh Commandment of perpetual obligation? and may we not still add the very reason which the Apostle adds? "Moses," he says, "hath in every city them that preach him, being read in the synagogue every Sabbath-day." And in our synagogues, in our Protestant Christian churches, the Decalogue of Moses is visible to every eye and audible to every ear, and on every Sabbath-day, at the least, is still repeated, "Thou shalt not bow down to graven images, nor worship them," "Thou shalt not commit adultery," while the response and the petition of every heart is that God, in His mercy, would incline them to keep this law.

With regard to "things strangled" and to "blood," we know that from the earliest period of sin and sorrow blood was set apart for the holy prefiguring of that great redemption which, in the fulness of time, was to be offered as a sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world. And, therefore, under the Mosaic law, blood was, with reference to its typical character, distinctly and emphatically said to be given to make an atonement for their souls. In the Old Testament we are told that "blood maketh atonement for the soul;" in the New, that "the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin." Under the old covenant "the High Priest went into the sacred

tabernacle once every year, not without blood, which he offered for himself and for the errors of the people, the Holy Ghost signifying that the way into the holiest of all was not yet made manifest;" under the new covenant we find, blessed be God! that Christ "being come, by His own blood He entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us." And in what words, and by what touching appeal do the ministers at the Lord's table implore God's blessing and His everlasting mercy on the humble communicant, "The blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, which was shed for you, preserve thy body and soul unto everlasting life!" Paul has left on record, for the solemn warning of the Church in every age, "He that despised Moses' law died without mercy: of how much sorer punishment shall he be thought worthy who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted *the blood* of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?"

SECTION LXXIV.

CHAP. XV. 30—41. *So when they were dismissed, they came to Antioch; and when they had gathered the multitude together, they delivered the epistle: which when they had*

read, they rejoiced for the consolation. And Judas and Silas, being prophets also themselves, exhorted the brethren with many words, and confirmed them. And after they had tarried there a space, they were let go in peace from the brethren unto the apostles. Notwithstanding, it pleased Silas to abide there still. Paul also and Barnabas continued in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others also. And some days after Paul said unto Barnabas, Let us go again and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, and see how they do. And Barnabas determined to take with them John, whose surname was Mark. But Paul thought not good to take him with them, who departed from them from Pamphylia, and went not with them to the work. And the contention was so sharp between them, that they departed asunder one from the other: and so Barnabas took Mark, and sailed unto Cyprus; and Paul chose Silas, and departed, being recommended by the brethren unto the grace of God. And he went through Syria and Cilicia, confirming the churches.

It was a noble commendation to the character of Paul and Barnabas, which we had in the last section—in that Apostolic letter which was addressed to all the Churches in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia—"our beloved Barnabas and Paul," "men that have hazarded their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ;" and this, too, the expression of men writing under the sanction and by the avowed guidance of the Holy Spirit; and who, seeing the grace of God given unto Paul, cordially extended the right-hand of fellowship to him, and acknowledged his undoubted com-

mission to preach the Gospel to the uncircumcision or the Gentile world; and thus dismissed them, no doubt with many prayers, to their further work in the cause of Christ.

One does not wonder that this return of their deputation caused great joy at Antioch, accompanied as they were by Judas and Silas, and by such a letter as that of which they were the bearers,—so distinctly repudiating the erroneous teaching of the "false brethren," and at once and for ever emancipating the Church from the heavy bondage of the law, as well as conveying such valuable and grateful testimony to the services and exertions of their own beloved teachers. And so we are told that when they had read the letter, "they rejoiced for the consolation" it afforded them. I think that this expression somewhat lets us into the spirit in which they had sent to Jerusalem to learn the decision of the Church on the point in question; that though they were most averse to receiving such a law as binding on their own consciences, though their own reason and their own teachers alike denied and rejected such a doctrine, yet, if it were necessary, if it were decided by competent authority that they could not be saved without it, they would not resist, however painful or onerous the bondage. It was, therefore, no doubt, great "consolation" to find it otherwise,

that no greater burden was laid upon them than what their own feelings and common sense assured them to be right.

Paul's present work at Antioch was now ended, and so, after some short stay to confirm and strengthen the Church in that city, he was anxious once more to set forth on the errand especially committed to his charge, of preaching among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ. His first feeling was to retrace the ground he had already traversed, and visit the brethren in every city where they had already preached the Word of the Lord, and see how they were going on; and, as he went, deliver to each Church a copy of the decree, and communicate unto them the glad tidings of the liberty wherewith Christ had made them free. He accordingly proposed the route to the former companion of his travel; but, alas! alas! for the infirmity of our common nature, that tie between these two holy men of God, which mutual suffering and hardship had only drawn the closer,—that still more intimate bond of union and fellowship in Christ Jesus, and which had commenced on that day when Barnabas first met Saul a shunned and isolated being in the streets of Jerusalem, and which had led them—hand, as it were, in hand, and heart linked with heart—through such wild and distant regions, and amid so many perils by the way, was now, for a time

at least, to be rudely rent asunder by a painful and unseemly contention between them.

I do not know anything that causes more scandal in the Church of Christ, that gives more pain to those who wish well, or more occasion of unkind invective and remark to those who wish ill to that Church than separations and bitterness and angry contentions between the ministers of the Gospel of peace, the servants of Him who has left such especial injunctions to us to "bear one another's burdens," and to "be kindly affectioned one to another in brotherly love, in honour preferring one another."

Well might Paul and Barnabas alike say, as they rushed amid the crowds at Lystra, "Sirs! we are men of like passions with you;" and yet who would have thought,—would not they themselves have deemed it an idle tale, had anyone told them on that day, that within a few months they would have parted in anger from the work, in which they were then so earnestly engaged? At this distance of time we are hardly justified in ascribing the blame to one more than to another; and yet, I know not why, one seems to think that a little more tenderness, a little more of a forgiving spirit, a little more of that feeling which was in Christ Jesus, when He said to the erring but repentant Peter, "Feed my sheep," in the heart of Paul, would have led him to restore his faulty brother Mark in a spirit of

meekness, and to have accepted his present readiness to accompany them as an evidence of renewed earnestness.

But, be this as it may, one rejoices to think that though it separated for a season at least this goodly trio of missionary labourers, it was only for a season; and we have Paul's especial commendation of Mark at a later period, as to his profitableness in the ministry. And I am not sure that we have not an intimation in one of Paul's epistles, that he and Barnabas became once more united in that work in which they had been so long engaged. In writing to the Corinthians (1 Cor. ix. 6), he says, "Or I only and Barnabas, have we not power to forbear working?" which may fairly imply, I think, that they were working together at the time, and can hardly refer to any past period of their ministry.

It is true, James says, "The wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God," but God frequently overrules the wrath and passions of man to educe His own purposes and further His own ends. And thus, instead of one company setting forth on its errand, two parties—Barnabas and Mark, and Paul and Silas, go forth on their respective missions—the one naturally first going to their own native island of Cyprus, and the latter, with similar instinct, first to his own Cilician home at Tarsus, and then to a certain extent retracing the backward route of the preceding year, "confirming the churches" already

planted, and no doubt adding to the Church daily such as should be saved.

SECTION LXXV.

CHAP. XVI. 1—8. *Then came he to Derbe and Lystra; and, behold, a certain disciple was there, named Timotheus, the son of a certain woman which was a Jewess, and believed; but his father was a Greek: which was well reported of by the brethren that were at Lystra and Iconium. Him would Paul have to go forth with him; and took and circumcised him, because of the Jews which were in those quarters: for they knew all that his father was a Greek. And as they went through the cities, they delivered them the decrees for to keep, that were ordained of the apostles and elders which were at Jerusalem, and so were the churches established in the faith, and increased in number daily. Now, when they had gone throughout Phrygia and the region of Galatia, and were forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach the word in Asia, after they were come to Mysia, they assayed to go into Bithynia: but the Spirit suffered them not. And they, passing by Mysia, came down to Troas.*

THIS chapter may be said to commence what is usually called Paul's second missionary journey, though its first portion may be more accurately described as "A Visitation of the Churches" already planted. The Apostle in one of his Epistles describes himself as "a wise master-builder," and most assuredly he showed himself to be such by the anxious care and supervision

which he exercised over every church both by letter and personal inspection. Nor was this a light or superficial care; he winds up that touching enumeration of his sufferings, to which I have so often alluded, by this climax, "Besides that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches." They were never forgotten in his prayers—"making mention of you all in my prayers"—"ceasing not to give thanks for you"—"giving thanks to God always for you all"—"always in every prayer of mine for you all making request with joy;" and, as far as we know, scarcely ever leaving a church which he had planted without repeated proofs of his anxiety and love.

It was the very purpose, you remember, which he had proposed to himself and Barnabas, "Let us go again, and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, and see how they do." And this portion of our chapter furnishes a very striking instance how Paul's affectionate heart yearned over those whom he had been the instrument of bringing to the knowledge of Christ. He had already twice visited Derbe and Lystra and Iconium, and the districts connected with those cities, and now he was preparing to visit them a third time. One seems to feel that there must have been some peculiar link which bound the Apostle's heart so closely and lovingly to that district, and perhaps the more *earnestly* from the recent shock it had

experienced in his separation from Barnabas and Mark. And I think these verses just give us the clue we need to what was apparently passing in Paul's mind when he determined to retrace his steps to Derbe and Lystra.

He was undoubtedly a man of strong feeling and ardent affections—every portion of his life, every word he utters, every line he pens, exhibits him as a man in whom natural affection was heightened to an intense degree by spiritual longings and desires. No doubt Lystra had its saddened associations—the idolatry he had witnessed, and to which he had so inadvertently added fuel, and the painful outrage to which he had been exposed, could hardly have passed away from his recollection. But still there was one among its inhabitants, to whom with instinctive, or perhaps we should rather say with prophetic earnestness, his spirit turned, as one who was henceforth to be to him, not simply a companion of congenial tastes and views, one "like-minded with himself," but as a son, his own son in the faith, who owed even his own self to Paul, united to him by the closest and truest bonds of Christian parentage and fellowship—his hope, his joy, his crown of rejoicing in the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ at his coming.

It is evident that Timothy had been converted to the faith before this third visit, and in all probability he was a seal to the Apostle's ministry at

his first coming to Lystra. We never think of Timothy without recalling to our grateful memories the names of his mother Eunice, and his grandmother Lois, so intimately and enduringly united in the work of training up this holy child for God. We know nothing of Timothy's father beyond that he was a Greek, and in all probability a proselyte of the Gentiles. One can hardly believe that so pious a woman as Eunice would herself have sought, or one so well read in God's Word as Lois would have sanctioned, though perhaps in itself legal, such an unequal, ill-assorted and perilous union with a heathen idolater: and the very circumstance of his child's early training in the Scriptures shows that the word of God was not merely permitted, but acknowledged and valued in his household; and there can be no doubt that, though not strictly a Jewish child, Timothy had been brought up in the Jewish faith.

But as the son of a Greek father he had never been circumcised; and according to the decree of the Council at Jerusalem, and which Paul was carrying round to the various churches as their rule of conduct, it was not necessary that he should be. And yet we read here, "Paul circumcised him because of the Jews that were in those quarters." Had Paul, then, altered his views of the doctrine? Not one jot nor tittle. Had he, like Peter, "through fear of

them of the circumcision," withdrawn and separated himself from his Gentile brethren, or can we for a moment suppose that Paul upheld the decree when it suited his purpose, and repudiated it when it was politic and expedient to do so? It would be profanation to admit such a thought, and I cannot but think that the mention of this decree in the very next verse, and it being expressly stated that Paul and Silas delivered them to each city to keep, is intentionally placed in this juxtaposition to the verse mentioning Timothy's circumcision in order to obviate the slightest misconception or misconstruction of the Apostle's motives.* And though at this distance of time we can hardly explain all the circumstances, yet we cannot hesitate in our conviction that he who so steadily and sturdily disallowed the circumcision of Titus, and yet sanctioned that of Timothy, was alike justified in both cases.

I think, too, that we see more prominently brought forward in this second missionary journey the especial guidance and direction of the Holy Spirit; and that it was in obedience to the injunc-

* Valpy, in his note on this chapter, mentions that the text here is supposed by Lord Barrington to be disturbed, and that these two verses 4, 5, should follow the last of chapter xv., which, he argues, would be a more natural order, and introduce the account of Timothy more easily. The suggestion, however, adopted in the text would render such a transposition unnecessary, and indeed undesirable.

tions of the Spirit, that Paul and his companions (for Timothy had now gone forth with them), surrendering their own purpose of preaching the Gospel through a far wider range of Asia, turned their steps westwards towards the shores of the Ægean, and prepared to pass over into Europe.

SECTION LXXVI.

CHAP. XVI. 9—12. *And a vision appeared to Paul in the night; There stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, saying, Come over into Macedonia, and help us. And after he had seen the vision, immediately we endeavoured to go into Macedonia, assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us for to preach the Gospel unto them. Therefore loosing from Troas, we came with a straight course to Samothracia, and the next day to Neapolis; and from thence to Philippi, which is the chief city of that part of Macedonia, and a colony: and we were in that city abiding certain days.*

THE Gospel of Jesus Christ was now to be preached in another hemisphere of the world. It had hitherto been confined to Asia, and comparatively as yet only to a limited district there. It was now to be transplanted into Europe also. I do not mean to say that neither the name nor the Gospel of Christ had as yet been heard in this quarter of the globe—no doubt it had, and we have every reason to believe that there were many

believers even in Rome. "Strangers of Rome" are expressly mentioned among the many foreigners at Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost, and one can hardly doubt that they carried with them to that imperial capital the wondrous tidings of what they had seen and heard.

But, as far as we know, no commissioned preacher, no Apostle had as yet set foot on European soil to plant that tree, which was hereafter, like the vine brought out of Egypt, not only to "take deep root and fill the land," but to "send out her boughs unto the sea and her branches unto the river." And when one looks at the altered destinies of Asia and of Europe—the one the cradle of the child, the other the habitation of the full-grown man—when one thinks how important a part Europe has since played, both for good and for evil, as regards the religion of Christ—how it has been the battle-field, the anticipated Armageddon or "mountain of spoil," on which the powers of darkness have waged their fiercest fight; and how the Lord in His inscrutable wisdom had even then chosen one little nook in the European continent, one solitary isle in the far-off Atlantic, as the depository of his future mercies to a then almost undiscovered world, one seems to think that the initiation of such a work should be ushered in with corresponding preparation. And so it was; and as the great work of the admission of the Gentiles into the

Church was prefigured by a vision to Peter in a trance, so a vision appeared unto Paul "in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falleth upon men:" "A man of Macedonia," representative of European need and destitution, like Ethiopia stretching out her hands to God's appointed messenger and saying to him, "Come over and help us." How very simple, and yet how expressive the words! And how often have they been quoted, and spoken, and written from still heathen lands to express the spiritual destitution and darkness in which they are lying, and their urgent need of some godly Philip, some loving Paul, some holy Barnabas, or other "Son of Consolation" to come and help them!

Nor was Paul disobedient to the heavenly vision; at once inferring its import, he and his company took advantage of a vessel, and, quitting Troas with a fair wind, anchored for the night at Samothracia, and the next day landed at Neapolis, a small seaport town about twelve or fourteen miles from Philippi. Many commentators have found an interest in imagining to themselves the feelings of the Apostle, as he sailed along these Ægean shores, and as he looked from his Samothracian anchorage at evening twilight or in morning dawn on the very scene of Homer's immortal "Iliad." I question whether even a passing thought was bestowed on

> "The plain where Simoïs and Scamander flow,
> Where *Priam's city* stood, or Ida's beetling brow."

I question whether Homer was read in the Jewish schools of Tarsus, or in the lecture-room of Gamaliel at Jerusalem; and though I deny not Paul's acquaintance with Grecian literature, I cannot but think his mind was too deeply occupied with the all absorbing interest of the work given him to do, and the one earnest purpose of his life to win souls to Christ. And if his eye gazed on the scene before him as he sailed from his Samothracian harbour, it would rather be to those Macedonian heights which, even in their unconscious mists and darkness, were soon to be irradiated with a nobler light than ever shone on the snowy Hœmus or the rose-clad Pangæus. No doubt the classic student remembers with unabated interest those glorious isles of the Ægean, and recalls those plains, whether of the Troad or of Macedonia, on which the poet and the historian have alike left a deathless fame, where Agamemnon and Achilles quarrelled, where Xerxes led his myriad hosts, or "Macedonia's madman" ruled. But I cannot but think that a far deeper interest attaches to this little band of missionaries, that a far brighter halo encircles their path-way, as, without friend or acquaintance, without introduction or commendation from or to any one, unknown and unbefriended, these Jewish strangers entered the Roman town of Philippi.

It is true they have received an addition to their number: Luke, the writer of these annals,

has now joined them, and you at once see with what unpretending humility he simply marks the fact by the adoption of that little pronoun "*we*" —"*we* came to Samothracia"—"*we* abode in the city certain days"—"assuredly gathering that the Lord had called *us* for to preach." Where Luke had joined them we do not know: evidently he had not set out with them from Antioch, though he is generally considered to have latterly resided there, and was, no doubt, intimate with the great Apostle of the Gentiles; and henceforward he became his zealous and disinterested associate and companion. We feel a deep interest in Luke's honoured name, not only because he was the writer of one of the four Gospels, but because, through the providence of God, we owe to him this narrative of the Acts of the Apostles, and of Paul especially, which we are now studying with so much of interest, and, I trust, of instruction also.*

* One of the countries which Paul visited on this journey, breaking, as it were, new ground, was Galatia, or Gallo-Græcia—"the region of Galatia," as Luke calls it. It was no hasty nor profitless visit, we know, even if the historian had not added that they went throughout it as well as Phrygia. No account is, however, given here of the results of Paul's ministry among them; but if we turn to his Epistle to the Galatians we shall find with what affectionate earnestness and love they received his first and earliest efforts. It would appear, also, from chap. iv. 13 that the Apostle had been attacked with much illness while among

SECTION LXXVII.

CHAP. XVI. 13—15. *And on the sabbath day we went out of the city by a river side, where prayer was wont to be made: and we sat down, and spake unto the women which resorted thither. And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard us: whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul.*

I HAVE said that Paul and his companions, as they entered Philippi, were "unknown and unbefriended." It is not because we find no synagogue of his countrymen in that city, for the worshippers there would probably have been among his bitterest opponents; but there are no indications of cordiality or intercourse, or offered hospitality, on the part of any, for some days at least.

When, however, the Sabbath-day dawned, this little band of missionaries had discovered that there was a Proseucha, or small tenement, fitted up outside the gates of the city, on the river side,

them, and, if not actually disabled, at least preaching the Gospel in much "infirmity of the flesh" among them; and though Luke, with characteristic humility, never mentions anything personally and peculiarly relating to himself, he may have been in that neighbourhood, and, hearing of Paul's illness, may have hastened to him as a friend and physician, and continued to accompany him on his further route into Europe.

where a few women, perhaps chiefly proselytes, used to meet for purposes of prayer. It is not the first time we have met with a little company of holy women on a Sabbath morning. On the morning of the Resurrection we found them hastening to the grave of Jesus, with their myrrh and aloes and sweet spices, to embalm the body of their Lord. And now, in this distant land, some at least afar from their own home, engaged in the purposes of merchandise and traffic, and, no doubt, amid an adverse or at least a sneering population, we still find a few meeting together in a place where, apart from the crowds of Philippi, and in the quiet retirement of the river-side, prayer was wont to be made. It was a very simple, unpretending meeting,—a lowly house of God—a few women the worshippers beneath its roof—two or three unknown, humble-looking men, and one, at least, in enfeebled health, entering in, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God. And yet on this meeting the eye of Jesus was as assuredly resting as on Nathanael beneath his fig-tree; or on Daniel in his chamber; and His blessing descended as truly and abundantly as His dew on Gideon's fleece.

From the language here used it would not appear that Paul or any of his companions in the usual sense of the word preached to these women on the river side. It would seem to have been

rather conversational intercourse,* in which all apparently took their part, and succeeding, no doubt, the prayers in which they had been engaged, though one may readily believe that Paul took the chief part, and was the most effective speaker; and Luke, with his usual humility, mentions no other name than his, that it was to his arguments and his words that the Lord opened the heart of one, especially, to attend.

One wonders, perhaps, that a like blessing and a like result do not more frequently descend on our religious services and meetings. It is quite true, as true now, in these our days of comparatively cold and heartless preaching, as it was under the far more stirring energy of apostolic exhortation, that, as one well observes,† "God never invites to an empty entertainment,"—and yet one cannot deny that many go away unfed, unstrengthened, uncheered. "Of the multitudes that press into our churches at this day," says Dr. Horneck, "some are of Gallio's mind, and care for none of these things—only come for fashion's sake; some, with Felix, make themselves merry with the preacher's discourse and expressions; others, like Agrippa, are only almost persuaded to be Christians; but only here and there one, whose heart, like Lydia's, God opens to attend to the things spoken by His messenger."

* ελαλουμεν. † Vanderkiste's "Dens of London."

You may resolve it into God's will, if you like; but that does not meet the case. God willeth not the death of a sinner—God willeth not that any should perish—God willeth not that any should depart unfed, lest they should faint by the way. His call is, 'Ho! every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters; come, buy and eat, without money and without price;' and His promise is, 'Ask, and ye shall have,' 'I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life *freely*.' We may well then ask, with the astonishment of the Prophet, "Is there no balm in Gilead? is there no physician there? why then is not the health of the daughter of my people recovered?" Why, indeed? And I have no hesitation in saying,—Because men neither hunger nor thirst—because, like the son in the parable, with obedience and devotion on their lips, they, too, say, 'I come,' but straightway forget for what purpose they have come, and gather round them, as it were, all manner of idle, frivolous, and extraneous thoughts to keep them company, and ward off all attention to the preacher's words. There was no miracle wrought in Lydia's conversion to the faith—the Lord, indeed, gave her the open and obedient heart to attend and listen to the things spoken of Paul, and, like the congregation at Antioch, she was anxious and earnest to hear more. I confess that when I see a person enter into our congregations in a careless, irre-

verent manner, thrust his head into his hat in a hurried, scrambling way, just to say a word or two of meaningless form, and then look round him to see what can attract his notice, it is no lack of charity to say, that man has sought no blessing, and consequently will find none.

That Sabbath-day at Philippi was, indeed, blessed of God throughout all eternity. We at this day and in our own distant land have reason to bless God that Paul and his companions entered that humble tenement on the river-side, and that the Lord opened the heart of Lydia to attend to the things she then heard; for that day's preaching formed the seed-bed of the Philippian Church, and to that Church we owe that Epistle to the Philippians, in which Paul's affectionate heart gushes over in every expression of the most fervent attachment, and the most perfect confidence and trust in their continuance in the faith, in which there is not one word of rebuke, nor one qualifying expression to diminish his joy.

Paul and his party had been forbidden by the Holy Ghost to preach the Word in Asia, but to direct his course into Europe; he obeys, and yet the seed sown in Philippi is wafted back even into Asia: and as at Philippi, so at Thyatira, a Church sprang up, of which the Lord declares, "I know thy works and charity, and service and faith, and thy patience and thy works, and thy last to be more than the first." Lydia carried her purple

and fine linen from Thyatira to Philippi to trade with them; she brought back with her from Philippi to Thyatira that, "the merchandise of which was better than the merchandise of silver, and the gain thereof than fine gold."

SECTION LXXVIII.

CHAP. XVI. 16—24. *And it came to pass, as we went to prayer, a certain damsel possessed with a spirit of divination met us, which brought her masters much gain by soothsaying. The same followed Paul and us, and cried, saying, These men are the servants of the most high God, which show unto us the way of salvation. And this did she many days. But Paul, being grieved, turned, and said to the spirit, I command thee, in the name of Jesus Christ, to come out of her. And he came out the same hour. And when her masters saw that the hope of their gains was gone, they caught Paul and Silas, and drew them into the market-place unto the rulers, and brought them to the magistrates, saying, These men, being Jews, do exceedingly trouble our city, and teach customs which are not lawful for us to receive, neither to observe, being Romans. And the multitude rose up together against them; and the magistrates rent off their clothes, and commanded to beat them. And when they had laid many stripes upon them, they cast them into prison, charging the jailer to keep them safely: who, having received such a charge, thrust them into the inner prison, and made their feet fast in the stocks.*

You remember the scene at Lystra, how Paul

was stoned, and dragged out of the city for dead. And here we have a similar scene of violence and outrage, though not carried to the same extent. In writing to the Corinthians, and speaking of his own sufferings for the Gospel's sake, he says of himself, that "whereinsoever others had suffered, he had suffered more, in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, and in prisons more frequent." And then he goes on in detail, how that no less than five times had he received of the Jews the limited number of stripes appointed by their law,* and had been, besides, thrice scourged by the Gentiles, to which no limits were affixed. We have one instance of the latter scourging now before us.

It does not appear that at Philippi any opposition was made to the doctrine of the Gospel: as a Roman colony, it troubled not itself with questions of Jewish law or Christian faith; and Paul and his companions, for aught we see, might have gone on to preach Jesus Christ unnoticed, or at least unmolested of the magistrates. But the new faith came in contact with the worldly interests of some; their gains were seriously injured by an act of humanity on the part of the Apostles, and

* The law of Moses forbade the punishment of scourging to exceed forty stripes: the scourge used by the Jews had three thongs, and each stripe counted three, so that thirteen stripes made up the number thirty-nine, and fourteen would have been two over the legal number.

unhappily such a collision is never forgiven nor forgotten by the world. A man may violate all the commandments of the first table, and most of those of the second,—except as far as the law of man steps in to prohibit—and be still welcomed and favoured and petted in the world's circles, but let him once interfere with the world's gains, —let him once advocate a practice or a principle that clashes with the world's principle or practice, and though he be a Paul, or an Apostle, or an angel of light, he will find little mercy at the world's hands, or little mildness from the world's tongue.

Of this young damsel who is said here to be possessed with a spirit of divination we know nothing more than is told us in this chapter. Probably she was a Jewess, and as there were few in the capacity of servants in those days, who were not also slaves purchased by their master's money, this person was probably also in the same condition. To a heathen, the malady under which she laboured would appear as a heaven-sent gift, such as was often claimed and pretended to by the priestesses and pythonesses of their temples and groves, and was accordingly turned to account in the present instance by her mercenary masters, who would naturally represent her ravings and incoherencies as the dictates of inspiration, and, it may be, often tutored the answer to suit the purpose. To a Jew, however,

such a malady would appear in its true light; and in the narratives of the Gospel persons possessed of devils have been continually brought under our notice. It was by somewhat of the same involuntary impulse that the man in the synagogue at Capernaum with the unclean spirit cried out to Jesus, "I know thee who thou art, the Holy One of God," or those two in the country of the Gergesenes, "What have we to do with thee, Jesus thou Son of God?" So here this damsel, possessed of a similar evil spirit, followed Paul and his companions about the city crying aloud "that they were servants of the most high God commissioned to show unto men the way of salvation." It is difficult to say whether this was the involuntary and compulsory testimony of the evil spirit, or whether the spirit instigated the cry in order to produce the result which followed. At any rate Paul with holy indignation repudiated the testimony from such a source, and commanded the spirit in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her.

And now there was re-enacted a similarly painful outrage to that which had befallen the Apostle at Lystra; then, however, it was the tumultuous act of certain Jews taking the law into their own hands, and venting their own spite and malice on the defenceless head of their victim. But here is a Roman colony, under Roman law, inhabited by Roman citizens, and governed by Roman

Prætors; and we might have looked for fairer treatment and less cruel outrage in such a city. Paul, indeed, in after life speaks of the persecutions and afflictions he endured at Antioch, Iconium, and at Lystra, but without bitterness or even resentment. Yet when he mentions what befell him at Philippi, he restrains not the feelings of the man, but gives utterance to his indignant remembrance of that day's treatment, and appeals to the knowledge of the Thessalonians for a confirmation of the "shameful treatment" he and his companion Silas had experienced in Philippi. (1 Thess. ii. 2.)

It is true we find that both Paul and Silas were Roman citizens, and you may perhaps ask why they did not put forward their privilege as such before, as we find them doing after, the outrage had been perpetrated. But how do we know that they did not? I think most probably they did, but that amid the yelling and outcries of the people, the fury of their oppressors, and the violence of the magistrates themselves commanding their garments to be torn from their backs, their appeal was lost in the din, or, if heard, only derided and disbelieved.

And now then was Satan's end apparently accomplished; as it was when Jesus hung on the cross on Calvary, or when Peter lay in prison between two soldiers and bound with two chains, or when Paul himself lay as dead before the

walls of Lystra. Human precaution and hellish device had thrust these men into the inner prison bound and bleeding as they were, and had made their feet fast in the stocks, and thus the night closed in on these apparently forsaken ones.

SECTION LXXIX.

CHAP. XVI. 25—40. *And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God; and the prisoners heard them. And suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken: and immediately all the doors were opened, and every one's bands were loosed. And the keeper of the prison awaking out of his sleep, and seeing the prison doors open, he drew out his sword, and would have killed himself, supposing that the prisoners had been fled. But Paul cried with a loud voice, saying, Do thyself no harm: for we are all here. Then he called for a light, and sprang in, and came trembling, and fell down before Paul and Silas, and brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved? And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house. And they spake unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; and was baptized, he and all his straightway. And when he had brought them into his house, he set meat before them, and rejoiced, believing in God with all his house. And when it was day, the magistrates sent the serjeants, saying, Let those men go. And the keeper of the prison told this saying to Paul, The magistrates have sent to let you go: now therefore*

depart, and go in peace. But Paul said unto them, They have beaten us openly uncondemned, being Romans, and have cast us into prison: and now do they thrust us out privily? nay verily; but let them come themselves and fetch us out. And the serjeants told these words unto the magistrates: and they feared, when they heard that they were Romans. And they came and besought them, and brought them out, and desired them to depart out of the city. And they went out of the prison, and entered into the house of Lydia: and when they had seen the brethren, they comforted them, and departed.

THERE was, no doubt, much sorrow and perplexity n Philippi that night. There would be great adness in the house of Lydia, and in the hearts of Timothy and Luke; and many a convert esides, who had perhaps also with the same open eart attended to the things spoken of Paul, would be perplexed and mournful at their own oss, and the sufferings of their teachers. Perhaps, oo, the heart of that poor damsel whom Paul, in he name of Jesus Christ, had restored to her ight mind, and who might now be sitting, in pirit, at the feet of Jesus, would be saddened lso to think of what had already happened to er benefactors, and what more of cruelty and wrong the morrow might bring forth. I think, oo, the magistrates, those Roman Prætors, who ad so evidently acted contrary to the law, and were liable to such severe condemnation and punishment, must have been strangely perplexed when they thought of the possible consequences

of their own act; perhaps, too, the rumour had already reached them that these men had cried out that they were Roman citizens, and thus added to their panic. So that, as I have said, there must have been much sorrow and perplexity in Philippi that night.

And if we go onwards to that dark and miserable cell where these victims of Philippian outrage were lying, their backs torn and bleeding, and perhaps still uncovered and soiled in the dust, their hands manacled, and their feet fast in the stocks, we should not be surprised to find that the poor prisoners were the saddest of all, sad in their present sufferings, and sadder in the prospect of the morrow. And yet one who had himself passed many a night within a prison's walls, bound with chains, has left on record that "it is thankworthy, if a man for conscience sake toward God endure grief, suffering wrongfully;" and he adds that "if when ye do well, and suffer for it, and take it patiently, this is acceptable with God." And the reason he assigns is, that "even hereunto were we called," to be conformed unto the image and pattern and spirit of the meek and suffering Saviour.

How, then, was this principle carried out in the prison-house at Philippi? We have it recorded here: "At midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God," and that with no hushed nor bated voice, as if they were

afraid or ashamed of their work. Their clear and articulate voices sounded through every cell, and each prisoner heard and wondered at the unwonted sound in such a place. Prayer first—then praise and thanksgiving, the natural result of prayer, the petition and the answer. When David rose at midnight to give thanks, he too was in sorrow and trouble, but his limbs were unfettered and his body free; but here—the voice of melody and thanksgiving was heard amid imprisonment and torture!

It may have been that this earthquake was occasioned by natural causes—be it so—but who is it that sends the stormy wind and hurricane, the earthquake, and the famine, and the pestilence, the hornet, the palmer-worm, and the caterpillar? But as we read the narrative, this shaking of the earth, this convulsion of the foundations of the prison-house, and this loosening of the prisoners' bands, seems to have been confined to the gaol alone; and most assuredly there must have been some miraculous restraints over the minds and bodies of the various prisoners, that, with freedom in their grasp, not one availed himself of the opportunity.

I think there has been generally somewhat of harsh measure dealt out to this Philippian gaoler, as if he had been not merely rude and rough, as probably he was, but wantonly cruel and unnecessarily severe in his treatment of Paul

and his companion. And yet I cannot see the slightest trace of such, nor of anything beyond the strict and conscientious fulfilment of his duties. He had been charged to keep them safely, and the stocks, which have been generally alleged as heightening his cruelty, were evidently there beforehand, and appointed by the magistrates for the very purpose for which he had used them. His first impulse to commit suicide when he thought his prisoners had fled, shows the anxiety of his mind and conscience with regard to his duties; and every circumstance of his after conduct towards Paul and Silas, taken in connexion with what had preceded, evidences not only the strong conviction of his mind, but the real tenderness and humanity of his natural disposition. He no doubt well knew the charge on which they had been scourged and imprisoned, he had himself in all probability heard the damsel in the streets as she followed Paul and his companions, crying out that they were come to show unto men the way of salvation. And now that the truth of this was so marvellously and miraculously attested to his own senses by what had occurred in the prison—with the same impulse which at first would have led him to self-destruction, he now sprang in, exclaiming, "What must I do to be saved? Men of God, show unto me, even me also, the way of salvation." Paul's instant answer went to the root of

the matter; like Philip in the desert, so Paul in the prison "preached unto him Jesus." One cannot help thinking, too, that there is something indicative of this man's natural disposition and tenderness of character that his whole household were so willing and ready to join their master and cast in their lot with his in their profession of the faith, as well as being baptized, though no doubt it involved both peril and loss.

It was in writing to these very Philippians that Paul had said, "I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound"—in self-respect, as well as in honour of the name and Gospel of Jesus Christ. And the Apostle is as much a pattern and example to us in this dignified and firm assertion of his rights, without a single compromise of the true spirit of Christian forgiveness and meekness even towards those who had injured him, as he was in the meek endurance of the wrongs themselves, and his cheerful trust in God during their continuance. And thus as Satan's triumph on Calvary was signalized by the plucking of a brand out of the burning in the thief upon the cross, so Paul's bonds in Christ at Philippi were as surely to the furtherance of the Gospel in the conversion of a whole household to the faith in Christ.

SECTION LXXX.

CHAP. XVII. 1—4. *Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where was a synagogue of the Jews: and Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them, and three sabbath days reasoned with them out of the scriptures, opening and alledging, that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead; and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ. And some of them believed, and consorted with Paul and Silas; and of the devout Greeks a great multitude, and of the chief women not a few.*

WE now lose the personal guidance of the historian who has so graphically described the scenes at Philippi. He had but recently joined Paul and Silas, apparently accompanying them from Troas or its neighbourhood to Philippi. It is supposed that he and Timotheus were left behind in that city to establish and confirm the Church, from which its chief pastors had been so rudely torn. Nor do we meet with Luke again in personal attendance upon the Apostle till they met once more at Troas after an interval of nearly six years. We are not concerned in this history to inquire in what way, nor in what places, Luke was engaged during this lengthened interval. We can hardly doubt that in some way the separation was for the furtherance of the Gospel, and that Luke, though absent in body was yet present in spirit with

the Apostle, and rejoiced when once more permitted to cast in his lot and share the burden with the friend and associate of so many years. At any rate we now miss the minute detail and the graphic sketch of the eye-witness, and have to make our way through the hurried and condensed narrative of the next two or three chapters.

After the events which had occurred at Philippi, and which, no doubt, rendered their further stay in that city unadvisable, Paul and Silas seem to have set out alone, with the purpose of reaching Thessalonica. It was a long and fatiguing journey for men who had so recently suffered from "the shameful treatment" they had experienced at Philippi, and we have no reason to suppose that at any time the Apostles had it in their power to work miracles for their own healing and support. At Lystra, indeed, Paul had experienced the tender mercy of the Lord in restoring him, when stoned and taken up for dead; but as the Apostles were men of like passions with others, so were they of like sufferings also, and we may well believe that these two missionaries, with frames enfeebled and backs but imperfectly healed, and feet swollen from the stocks, set out on their lengthened route of 100 miles to the Macedonian capital. How long the journey occupied we know not; they appear not to have tarried on their way; neither Amphipolis nor Apollonia seems to have detained them beyond probably

offering them a lodging for the night. They hastened on to the more important sphere which Thessalonica opened to their labours. In such a place of resort one would be surprised not to find a synagogue of the Jews, but as it is expressly noticed, and with the definite article "the," which our translation omits, "where was *the* synagogue of the Jews," it would seem to imply that Thessalonica was the central spot of all the surrounding district, extending even to Apollonia and Amphipolis.

But though we lose the faithful guidance of Luke's personal participation in the scenes he describes, we have Paul's own allusions to so many incidents and feelings connected with his ministry among the Thessalonians, both in his first and second epistles to them, that one almost looks upon those letters as a kind of diary of his proceedings among them; at any rate as furnishing abundant hints for filling up the brief and imperfect sketch given us by the historian.

One cannot, however, fail seeing at the first glance how sincere and earnest was that expression of St. Paul, how it evidently welled up from the deep feelings of his heart when he said, "Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved." And yet, most assuredly, if evil entreated of the Gentiles, he was still more so of the Jews. They were Jews who were banded together against him

at Damascus, at Jerusalem, at Antioch, and Iconium and Lystra; if he was thrice scourged by the heathen, he was five times by the Jews: and yet wherever he found his countrymen, wherever there was a synagogue into which he could enter, there "he preached Jesus." And so here at Thessalonica it is expressly said that Paul, "*as his manner was*," went into the synagogue, and for three successive Sabbaths, with the Word of God in his hands, appealing to its living word, pointing to its holy truths, as he unrolled passage after passage before him, he reasoned with them, as Jesus had done with his two disciples on the road to Emmaus, and "beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Jesus," "opening and alledging out of those Scriptures that Christ must needs have suffered." It is the very language of Luke's own Gospel, "Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory?" Yes! He "must needs have suffered," ere He arose from the dead: He must needs drink of the brook by the way, ere He lift up the head.

It would seem that the Apostle in his preaching must have dwelt on the three-fold character of Christ, as Prophet, Priest, and King, and more especially on the latter character, and that this furnished the handle of accusation against him before the authorities, as if he was setting up a

king in opposition to the authority of the Roman Emperor. One fears that the novelty of Paul's doctrine, as well as his earnestness and eloquence in delivering it, were at first the chief attractions to his countrymen; and though no doubt many were savingly converted to the faith, yet we invariably find after a time the majority, moved by envy, and jealousy, and bigotry, attempting to thwart the further progress of the Gospel, and too often succeeding in driving its preachers from city to city. It was so in Thessalonica. We know not how long Paul and Silas continued there, probably some considerable time. At the close of the third Sabbath it would seem that Paul's labours were transferred from his own countrymen to the Gentile population, and with such acceptance and success that the tidings of the faith of these Thessalonian converts extended far and wide through all Macedonia and Achaia, "how they had turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God." *

* I would just quote a very interesting allusion to Thessalonica in a speech of Sir Culling E. Eardley, at a recent Meeting of the Evangelical Alliance. "He might mention," he said, "the encouraging fact that there was now at Thessalonica (Saloniki) the first native Turkish ordained Christian minister. He and his family had been brought to the knowledge of the truth by reading the Scriptures. They removed to Malta, and, after residing for some time in that island, had gone to Constantinople, where he was ordained by the American missionaries last December, and was now labouring among the Armenians and Turks."

SECTION LXXXI.

CHAP. XVII. 5—15. *But the Jews which believed not, moved with envy, took unto them certain lewd fellows of the baser sort, and gathered a company, and set all the city on an uproar, and assaulted the house of Jason, and sought to bring them out to the people. And when they found them not, they drew Jason and certain brethren unto the rulers of the city, crying, These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also; whom Jason hath received: and these all do contrary to the decrees of Cæsar, saying that there is another king, one Jesus. And they troubled the people, and the rulers of the city, when they heard these things. And when they had taken security of Jason, and of the other, they let them go. And the brethren immediately sent away Paul and Silas by night unto Berea: who, coming thither, went into the synagogue of the Jews. These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so. Therefore many of them believed; also of honourable women which were Greeks, and of men, not a few. But when the Jews of Thessalonica had knowledge that the word of God was preached of Paul at Berea, they came thither also, and stirred up the people. And then immediately the brethren sent away Paul, to go as it were to the sea: but Silas and Timotheus abode there still. And they that conducted Paul brought him unto Athens: and receiving a commandment unto Silas and Timotheus for to come to him with all speed, they departed.*

MALICE never wanted grounds for the most preposterous of accusations, because malice never

stopped at falsehood to secure its end. We, at this day, who are so thoroughly acquainted with Paul's opinions and feelings from his own pen, know with what urgency he inculcated on all submission to the powers that be. "Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers," is his exhortation to the Christians at Rome. "There is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God; whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God." "Fear God, honour the King." And yet the charge at Thessalonica against Paul and Silas was that "they did contrary to the decrees of Cæsar, saying, there was another King, Jesus." It was the same with Paul's Master, and as Luke wrote of the one, so he wrote of the other, "We found this fellow perverting the nation and forbidding to give tribute to Cæsar, saying that he himself is Christ, a king." "Render unto Cæsar the things that be Cæsar's," had been the teaching of Jesus; "Render unto all their dues, tribute to whom tribute is due," was the teaching of the other; and yet as malice hesitated not to prefer the charge against the Master, so it stirred up a similar outcry against the disciple.

Paul's residence in Thessalonica had been marked by peculiar tenderness and discretion, endeavouring to give no offence in anything, that his ministry might not be blamed. I am not so much speaking of the gentleness which marked

his intercourse among his Thessalonian converts, loving, and cherishing, and gentle with them, he says, even as a mother that nurseth her own children, and would shield them from every harm; but I am speaking more of that principle, which so continually influenced the whole of the Apostle's ministerial course, of making his own hands minister to his necessities, and, as he tells the Thessalonians, that he laboured night and day that he might not become chargeable to any of them. He had, indeed, left behind him at Philippi a body of converts affectionately and zealously devoted to him; their remembrance of his sufferings on their behalf drew forth their kindest feelings towards him and Silas, and more than once during his stay at Thessalonica they sent testimonials of their affectionate remembrance of him, probably by the hands of Timotheus, who, it would appear, had again joined him.

We find from Luke's narrative that Paul and Silas had found a lodging in the house of a man of the name of Jason. The name of Jason is again mentioned by Paul as a kinsman of his own, who sent salutations to the Church at Rome; but I can hardly think they were the same persons. Had it been so, Luke, I think, would have just put in one word or expression to intimate the providential goodness of the Lord in thus directing the steps of his servant in this far distant land to the house of one who was

a kinsman according to the flesh, nor would Paul probably in his mention of his name have omitted some word expressive of his grateful recollection of the kindness received beneath his roof. The question, indeed, is of little moment. Jason was undoubtedly a convert, and Paul's residence beneath his roof must have been a blessing, even though his house was disturbed and outraged by a tumultuous mob, and himself dragged before the magistrates to answer for the kindness and hospitality he had shown to these strangers.

The magistrates of Thessalonica were men of a different mould to those of Philippi; and though the charge against Paul and Silas, however groundless in reality, was a far more serious one than had been preferred at Philippi, and involved far more important consequences to themselves—and we find that they were in consequence much "troubled" at the matter—yet they appear to have acted with great prudence and discretion, and to have quieted the disturbance by taking security of Jason as their host for the future appearance of the accused if they should be again summoned before them.

It was a missionary principle laid down by Jesus Christ himself for the guidance and direction of his servants, "When they persecute you in one city, flee ye to another;" and many and many a a time, no doubt, had they all occasion to adore the providential wisdom of the Lord which had

left them such a rule as a light unto their path. But to Paul especially must it have been essentially needful; to him almost literally there was scarcely any rest for the sole of his foot, and, if not "wandering in deserts and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth," yet assuredly having sore "trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover, and of bonds and imprisonment."

From Thessalonica, therefore, in obedience to his Lord's mandate, Paul and Silas went to Beræa between fifty and sixty miles distant from the former city, and, which perhaps recommended it, off the high road, and in a more retired locality.* Beræa is ever favourably associated in the mind of every Christian reader of "The Acts" with the honourable testimony borne by the writer to the noble character and honest sincerity of a large portion of its population. With Paul's usual love for his brethren, though driven forth from Thessalonica by their machinations, his first act was to go into the synagogue of the Jews and there preach Jesus. His doctrine was indeed new, but his arguments and proofs

* Mr. Lewin makes a most happy and apposite quotation from Cicero's speech against Piso in confirmation of the view in the text:—"Thessalonicam omnibus inscientibus noctuque venisti, qui, cum concentum plorantium et tempestatem querelarum ferre non posses, *in oppidum devium, Beræam*, profugisti"—"a town off the road."

were drawn from those Scriptures in which both alike believed, and to which both could appeal. "To the law and to the testimony," was their prophet's counsel, and with earnest hearts and willing spirits anxious only for the truth, "they searched the Scriptures daily" for confirmation of the preacher's doctrine, and to them, therefore, was abundantly realized that "the Spirit of prophecy was the testimony of Jesus." What a precious testimony to the blessedness of a prayerful, careful, *daily* use of God's Word!—"They searched the Scriptures daily; therefore they believed."

Yet even here persecution followed them, the same bigotry, the same unrelenting hatred—"If they have hated me, they will also hate you"—and yet, notwithstanding, in every way and in far more distant lands, Christ was preached and Paul rejoiced. But so urgent was the present peril that, leaving Silas and Timotheus, as less marked objects than himself, to carry on the work so favourably begun, Paul was hurried off by his friends to the coast, and there, taking ship, sailed to Athens: and, on reaching that city, sent back those who had escorted him thither, with an earnest entreaty that his two companions would rejoin him with all speed.

SECTION LXXXII.

CHAP. XVII. 16—18. *Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was stirred in him, when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry. Therefore disputed he in the synagogue with the Jews, and with the devout persons, and in the market daily with them that met with him.*

IT has been conjectured by some that Paul had no intention of preaching the Gospel at Athens; that he had simply sought that city as a safer refuge from persecution than Thessalonica or Berœa; and that he purposed to remain there in perfect quietude, at least till Silas and Timotheus joined him. I cannot for a moment admit such a supposition. I would as soon believe that the pent-up waters of a stream, the moment the dam was opened, would stay quietly in their bed and not rush onwards—I would as soon believe that at my own bidding the sun would stand still, or the moon stay her course—I would as soon believe that the angel sent forth from God with the everlasting Gospel in his hand to preach unto them that dwell on the earth would stop his flight in the midst of heaven, and forget his errand.

I think we are apt to take a wrong view of Paul at Athens. Heathen mythology and classic story, poets and philosophers, heroes and statesmen and orators, have alike contributed to throw a halo around its scenes, which even to this day

invests them with imperishable interest; and we think of a traveller entering Athens with much the same feelings as a traveller of the present day would enter Rome. His whole memory would go back through its past ages of glory, and repeople every street and hill and the banks of every stream with their former occupants; and as in Athens we might call up before us Pericles on the Bema, or Plato in the Groves of Academus, so we might recall Cicero in the Forum, or Cæsar in the Senate-house. From our earliest years heathen romance and tales have been familiar to us, and we perhaps know the annals of Greece and Rome far more accurately than our own.

It was not so with the Apostle. His earlier associations could have no identity with Grecian literature, any more than his predilections with Grecian mythology. The reading of his childhood had led him far beyond the origin of Greece or Rome, when the patriarchs of his race were the 'friends of God,' and lived in tents on the Chaldæan plains—or the lawgiver of his land led forth his people from Egyptian bondage, and God himself proclaimed their law amid thunderings and lightnings on Sinai. The whole tone and tenour of the Apostle's mind must have been antagonistic to the superstitious idolatry that met him at every step, whether in Asia or in Europe. He could have no sympathy even with the art that consecrated its creations to the worship of a

false god: the errand on which he was sent, the very purpose for which he had been set apart of God in so signal and marvellous a manner, was to call on men to turn from these lying vanities, these dumb idols, to serve the living and true God. Wherever he saw an image or a statue, it reminded him of the work given him to do; wherever he saw a temple of a heathen deity, however magnificent the building or imposing its architecture, he could only regard it as an insult to the God of heaven, and a mockery to the wants of man. It is very different with ourselves; heathen temples no longer usurp the place, no longer come into collision with our own purer faith. Our spirits need not be stirred within us at the adoration paid to Jupiter or Diana or the Paphian Venus, any more than to Thor and Woden and the gods of our forefathers. We can afford to gaze with admiration and delight on those relics of ancient worship, because we think alone of the sculptor and the architect, and the spirit that still lives in every chiselled line and crumbling stone, and we waste no thought on the imaginary being whose name it bears.

We can be no judge of what Paul's feelings must have been, when for the first time he trod the streets of Athens. One might imagine perhaps what the feelings of such men as Henry Martyn or Henry Fox would have been when all the profanation, obscenity, cruelty, and super-

stition of Hindooism was presented to their eyes in some eastern city, unvisited by Christian missionary, but of the inward workings of Paul's heart on that day we can have very little conception.

But whatever may have been Paul's purpose in coming to Athens, he at any rate followed his usual course when there, disputing with the Jews, "as his manner was," in their synagogue on the Sabbath-day, and in the Agora, or usual place of resort, daily with the two great schools of Athens, the philosophers of "the garden," and "the porch." We do not find that Paul met with the usual opposition, and certainly not the persecution to which he had been so often exposed elsewhere. The Jews probably were not more willing hearers, as a body, than in the synagogues of Iconium or Thessalonica, but a Jew in Athens had little influence and was held in scornful indifference by its philosophers; and Paul, as a Jew only, might have gone on preaching to his countrymen for ever, for aught they would have cared or interfered. But Paul preached a new and strange doctrine even to Athenian ears—he preached Jesus and the Resurrection. Alas! that doctrine was to the Greeks as much foolishness, as it was to the Jews a stumbling block; to the infidel Epicurean it sounded as mere babbling, to the proud Stoic as if the preacher spoke of deities unknown and unheard of even in their crowded calendar.

Alas! alas! how often do the most solemn truths fall heedless on the human heart, especially on the heart puffed up with vain philosophy and oppositions of science falsely so called. Paul was but as a babbler to some, while others listened, but with curiosity only, to what they deemed a bold and novel speculation, which might afford occupation for another day's discussion and amusement.

SECTION LXXXIII.

CHAP. XVII. 19—34. *And they took him, and brought him unto Areopagus, saying, May we know what this new doctrine, whereof thou speakest, is? For thou bringest certain strange things to our ears: we would know therefore what these things mean. (For all the Athenians, and strangers which were there, spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell or to hear some new thing.) Then Paul stood in the midst of Mars-hill, and said, Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious. For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you. God, that made the world, and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands; neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed anything, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things; and hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the*

earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation; That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us: for in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring. Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device. And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men everywhere to repent: because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead. And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked; and others said, We will hear thee again of this matter. So Paul departed from among them. Howbeit certain men clave unto him, and believed: among the which was Dionysius the Areopagite, and a woman named Damaris, and others with them.

One can hardly imagine that there was any judicial proceeding intended in bringing Paul before the court of Areopagus. As I hinted in the last section, the Apostle's doctrine was something new to Athenian ears, and Athenian ears were tickled with novelty. It was a question, too, concerning religion, the introduction or setting forth of new and strange gods, and the Areopagus was the regular court for such inquiries, so on the next court-day Paul was introduced to that august and solemn assembly on Mars-hill.

We shall lose a great deal of the interest of this meeting, as well as of the deep significance of Paul's address, unless we have a clear idea of the spot on which the Apostle stood, and from which he addressed the audience. The very words, half courteous, half sneering, in which the Apostle is invited to enter more fully into his doctrine, is at once a proof that no judicial proceeding was in contemplation at present, and that the meeting, if not altogether a friendly one, was in no degree hostile or persecuting. To while away an idle hour in an occupation rather more than usually exciting must have been a great boon to the listless stagnation of Athenian life.

You must not picture to yourselves a court of justice such as we see in our own land. "The judges (eight in number) sate in the open air upon seats hewn out in the rock on a platform, which was ascended by a flight of stone steps immediately from the Agora." "No place in Athens was so suitable for a discourse upon the mysteries of religion." *

And now let us for a few seconds attend to the more prominent points of Paul's address. It is evident that we have but, as it were, the skeleton of the discourse, the mere heads of that on which he dwelt; but how striking, how appropriate, how delicate and discreet every word he uttered; the

* Howson and Conybeare, vol. i.

wisdom of the serpent, the simplicity and harmlessness of the dove! Our translation in the first verse is singularly unhappy and altogether at variance with Paul's purpose of conciliating in the outset the goodwill and self-love of his auditors; and to tell them in the very first sentence that they were "too superstitious," would have been needlessly offensive. The word implies a more than ordinary attention to religion, taking a deep interest in religious matters; and in its literal etymology means, "one who fears the gods."

But with what peculiar tact and wisdom does Paul address himself to the point! He had been accused as a setter-up of strange gods, and that charge in Athens, and before such a court, if avowed and defended, would at once have led to prosecution and condemnation. But as he had passed along their city, as he had seen its inhabitants worshipping at this shrine and that, entering this temple and that, offering upon this altar and upon that, he had noticed one altar with this inscription on it, "To the Unknown God." There was, then, a God, as yet to them unknown: there was a Being to whom they offered worship and adoration, though they knew neither Him nor His Name. That Name,—as yet hidden and inscrutable, incommunicable, and unknown,—"I am now commissioned to make known unto you." When Paul proceeded to claim for that God, whom he preached unto them, that He was the

Creator of all things, that He made the world and all things therein, that He was Lord of heaven and earth, one can well imagine both Stoic and Epicurean listening with sceptic incredulity to a doctrine so utterly at variance with their respective tenets. And when the Apostle added that He dwelled not in temples made with hands, one can almost see every lip curling with disdainful sneer, and every eye turning with enthusiastic admiration to their own magnificent structures in very scorn of so wild a belief. They might have well deemed him a babbler for saying so, for, in all probability, the Apostle, as he spoke, pointed with his own hands to those very temples which rose in proud magnificence before them, the Theseum above, and the Parthenon below him, the noblest edifices which the skill of man had ever raised, and which even now in their ruins excite the wonder and admiration of a raptured world, and on which every Athenian present must have gazed as the most appropriate and imperishable habitations of their deities.

And yet those buildings, to which Paul pointed as no buildings of the living God, have now crumbled to decay and ruin like the religion of which they were the type, while the unknown God, Jesus and the Resurrection, which these polished Athenians deemed but vain babbling, is now again heard on the heights of the Acro-

polis, or among the crowded resorts of the Agora.*

One can hardly say that Paul's preaching was in vain, when one knows the worth of one soul, for *many*, it is said, believed. Yet one looks in vain through the pages of the New Testament for that evidence of the Apostle's labours of love among them, which Philippi and Thessalonica, and Corinth and Ephesus afford. No "Epistle to the Athenians" remains; none was ever written to testify of a Church of Christ among them, or that The Unknown God whom Paul preached unto them as "the Resurrection and the Life," was ever known as "the power of God" or "the wisdom of God." Of all that assembly that met that day on Mars-hill, the very names have

* The quotation which Paul makes in his address from "one of their own poets" has been generally ascribed to Aratus, and there can be little doubt that his poem was familiar to the Apostle's mind, inasmuch as Aratus was a Cilician, and therefore a countryman, but probably not so well known to an Athenian audience. And I think, therefore, that Paul meant that audience to infer that he was quoting from Cleanthes, who was actually "one of their own poets," and in whose noble hymn to Jupiter the very same words occur. Cleanthes was held almost in as high estimation as a leader of the Stoics, as Zeno their founder; and as one portion of the audience, whom Paul was addressing, was composed of Stoics, it was a well-turned and delicate compliment, as well as a shrewd conciliation of their prejudices, to introduce a quotation from one held in so high repute as Cleanthes.

passed away, save two—Dionysius and Damaris, who, "with certain others," clave unto Paul. The rest probably sneered on—talked, perhaps, for a day or two of the new doctrine they had heard, spoke with contempt or pity, just as the mood was, or whether they lounged in the porch or the garden, of him that preached it—and then hurried on in search of something still more novel than "Jesus and the Resurrection."

SECTION LXXXIV.

CHAP. XVIII. 1—4. *After these things Paul departed from Athens, and came to Corinth; and found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, lately come from Italy, with his wife Priscilla; (because that Claudius had commanded all Jews to depart from Rome:) and came unto them. And because he was of the same craft, he abode with them, and wrought: for by their occupation they were tentmakers. And he reasoned in the synagogue every sabbath, and persuaded the Jews and the Greeks.*

THE events of a very considerable period of Paul's life are here crowded by the historian into the compass of these few verses; and we are left, not indeed altogether to conjecture, but to other incidental allusions in the Apostle's own letters for a somewhat more continuous narrative than we find here.

We read in the last chapter that after Paul had spoken before the meeting on Areopagus, and they had contemptuously dismissed him, some in open derision, and others with an idle evasion half concealed under a semblance of courtesy, and very much in the spirit and with the same sincerity as Felix afterwards dismissed him, 'When I have a convenient season I will send for thee'—'We will hear thee again of this matter'—"so Paul departed from among them." It is evident, from the first words of the present chapter, that this does not refer to the Apostle's final departure from Athens, but to his leaving the assembly. Discouragement would not have stopped the course of him whom neither opposition nor persecution nor prohibition had deterred, and we must, therefore, refer Paul's final departure from Athens to some more direct communication from the Spirit of God Himself. He had, indeed, as you may remember, sent a message by those who had escorted him from Berea to Athens to Silas and Timotheus to rejoin him with all speed. Luke gives us no intimation that they had done so; but in the First Epistle to the Thessalonians, which was written during this visit at Corinth, we find, I think, that in all probability Timotheus at least had come to him at Athens, and that his report of the Thessalonians, though satisfactory on the main, still excited so much anxiety on several points communicated to him by Timothy, that

with his usual self-denial, and putting aside his own feelings and desires, he was content to forego the personal advantages and satisfaction of his friend's companionship, and accordingly sent him back to Thessalonica with the tenderest messages of love and watchful supervision over the interests of those he so dearly loved in the Lord; nor till he had been some time at Corinth did Silas and Timotheus join him.

We must, therefore, suppose that Paul left Athens for Corinth alone. It was, however, a journey of no great length nor risk, whether by sea or land—between forty and fifty miles by the latter—and so continuous was the stream of intercourse with Corinth from every quarter that the Apostle may have easily found associates in travel, if he was so disposed, or had needed them, as some have conjectured, from imperfect vision. We find, however, in this portion of our chapter, that Paul, during his residence at Corinth, carried into practice the same principle there also which had before influenced him at Thessalonica, of his own hands supplying his daily wants by daily labour; and I think we may deduce a very fair inference from the fact, that his eyesight was not so imperfect nor so impaired, if he was thus able to support himself by his manual labours in tent-making, the chief material of which was hair-cloth—such as travellers see to this day still

manufactured in the districts of Asia Minor and the Levant.

It was a providential arrangement, in its widest meaning, that Paul so immediately on his arrival at Corinth found not only fellow-labourers in his calling as a tent-maker, but fellow-helpers in his labours in the Gospel. No doubt Claudius, the Roman Emperor, obeyed the impulse of his own tyrannical and cowardly spirit in ordering all Jews to depart from Rome, who even then, as they have been ever since, had begun to be wanderers on the face of the earth, and at the mercy and beck of any despot who sate on a throne. And no doubt, too, Aquila and Priscilla looked upon it as a great hardship, and murmured perhaps at the severity of the edict, which left them homeless wanderers. And yet that edict was working out the Lord's purposes as effectually as when "there went out a decree from Cæsar Augustus that all the world should be taxed," and Joseph and his wife set out on their weary journey to Bethlehem. What a comfort to the Christian pilgrim to know that "the Lord reigneth, be the earth never so unquiet," and that those events, which to our finite vision seem hindrances in our course, are in reality the very stepping-stones placed by God in our path to smooth and expedite our way. Had Claudius never issued his edict, nor Aquila and Priscilla

been forced to migrate to Corinth, their names would never have been recorded in God's Bible, nor linked in imperishable bonds with that of Paul, as his fellow-labourers and helpers in the Gospel.

I know not whether they were Christians when Paul fell in with them, and that they were brothers in the Lord, before they were brothers in trade. I like to think otherwise; and that as they worked at their common toil, in their workman's garb, still Paul forgot not the one great purpose of his life, and "preached Jesus" unto Aquila and his wife. And how often does God bless, even to this day, a word spoken in season, or even dropped at random, in the workshop, at the loom, or at the forge, in the mill or in the mine, in the field at the plough or in the barn with the flail! And on the Sabbath, when the din and the hurry of the week's work was over, when quietude and calm and holy peace stole upon the Sabbath dawn in that lowly household, then did Paul, and no doubt his companions with him, enter into the synagogue, and every Sabbath, as if opposition, and unkindness, and outrage had never assailed him from a Jewish hand or heart, still reasoned with them, and with all affectionate earnestness endeavoured to pursuade them to embrace the Gospel.

SECTION LXXXV.

CHAP. XVIII. 5—11. *And when Silas and Timotheus were come from Macedonia, Paul was pressed in the spirit, and testified to the Jews that Jesus was Christ. And when they opposed themselves, and blasphemed, he shook his raiment, and said unto them, Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean: from henceforth I will go unto the Gentiles. And he departed thence, and entered into a certain man's house, named Justus, one that worshipped God, whose house joined hard to the synagogue. And Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his house: and many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized. Then spake the Lord to Paul in the night by a vision, Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace; for I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee; for I have much people in this city. And he continued there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.*

WE are not told of any of the results of Paul's preaching at the earlier period of his residence at Corinth, beyond the opposition and fierce blasphemy of the hostile Jews. But in all probability it was at this period, before Silas and Timotheus came to him from Macedonia, that those first-fruits of Achaia, Crispus, and Gaius, and the household of Stephanas, were gathered into the Church, of whom he speaks in his First Epistle to the Corinthians, as having, contrary to his usual practice, baptized them with his own hand, and, we may suppose, only on this

occasion because his coadjutors, Silas and Timotheus, had not as yet reached him, and he would not delay the work.

We have seen the Apostle in his solitude at Athens, carrying on the work alone, fighting the battle singly—the solitary tentmaker of Tarsus against all the literati and philosophers of the most renowned city of the world for science, and art, and learning—and yet even there—no doubt realizing to its fullest extent the consolation which had cheered his Master, "And yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me." There can be, however, no doubt that there must have been moments of deep anxiety—perhaps of despondence also. Though he had sent Timotheus back to Thessalonica, we know how his own heart longed to join him—how he sought opportunity to retrace his steps to those loved converts for whose welfare he so yearned; but, as he says, "Satan hindered him." And I would just make one remark on this expression of the Apostle, "Satan hindered me," that Paul could have no doubt of the actual existence and personality of Satan when he thus speaks of his hindering and thwarting malice; and the Holy Spirit, too, by whose inspiration Paul wrote, must have meant his readers to understand an actual as well as active agent in this work of hindrance.

And now the Apostle had gone even to a greater distance, and the two companions of his

labours had not yet found their way to him. No doubt, Aquila and Priscilla in some degree supplied the void, but every heart knows how, especially in seasons of anxious apprehension, both as regards the past and the present, the affections long for the tried associates of former labours—how, in the expectation of their return, the very days and hours are counted, till their presence once more gladdens and cheers the desponding feelings. One sees with what rebound the affectionate Apostle welcomed his companions—that up to that moment he had felt, as it were, a weight upon his spirit, as if hampered and bound by some unseen hindrance—and that now new life and vigour, new activity and zeal, were poured into his whole system; "he was pressed in spirit," and with renewed earnestness, in conjunction with them, testified to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ.

It was, however, at Corinth as it was elsewhere; the Jews were the fierce and implacable opponents of the Gospel of Jesus. And yet how continually do we find that even among them God had His chosen ones: in every synagogue, though the majority opposed and persecuted, and, at Corinth, even blasphemed, yet there were here and there a few whose hearts the Lord was continually opening to attend to the things spoken of his servants. It was not all wasted seed that Paul scattered even in the synagogue at Corinth—it was, indeed, only

as the gleaning of grapes, or as in the shaking of an olive tree, "two or three berries in the top of the uppermost bough, or four or five in the outmost branches." From the greater part he was with holy indignation compelled to separate, and declare that their blood was upon their own heads. And yet still with affectionate tenacity, though precluded the synagogue, he continued to preach in a house adjoining it, that so by any means he might win some.

There can be little doubt that Paul's position at Corinth at this period, even with Silas and Timotheus, and Aquila and Priscilla, to uphold and cheer, and share his trials, was a depressing one, even to his sanguine feelings and undaunted spirit. Rejected by his countrymen, and in some measure compelled to separate himself from them, persecuted and opposed, and the name of Jesus blasphemed and spoken evil of, he could have little hope of any further good among them. And then, when he turned to the heathen inhabitants of Corinth, he could find and feel little or no encouragement among that luxurious, profligate, and mercenary people, immersed in all the vices of the age and of every nation under heaven, as if with the merchandise of a country they imported its immorality also—men whom he describes, with the bold fidelity of an Elijah or a Baptist, as "fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, effeminate, abusers of themselves with mankind, thieves,

covetous, drunkards, revilers, and extortioners." Well might there be moments of despondency, as his eye glanced over such a field; well might he be disposed to turn away, and quit so sad a wilderness! And yet—"Be not afraid, Paul; hold not thy peace; speak on; for I am with thee, and out of this very class of degraded ones, out of the very midst of the burning will I pluck the brands, out of the very mire and clay will I gather them; and they shall yet be washed and sanctified and justified in the Name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of your God. Go on, then, to speak; for 'I have much people in this city.' Remember Elijah, how he complained, 'I am left alone, and they seek my life to take it away'—yet even then there were 7,000 men in idolatrous Israel that had bowed no knee to Baal. 'I have much people in this city.'" It is a precious truth that the Lord's eye seeth verdure and growth where man's eye can see only barrenness and waste. There is a little book which I have before quoted, written by a London missionary—one of those men of God with Paul's spirit and Paul's zeal and Paul's love—and it is called "The Dens of London." Aye, and the dens of London reek and swelter with as abominable filth and profligacy as the dens of Corinth; and I would say, if the spirit of such a man is inclined to despond and sadden when he thinks of the depths into which his mission leads him to grope, and

the opposition and persecution he may have to encounter, let him think of that vision which cheered the Apostle's heart in the midst of his work, and those words of blessed light in the midst of the thickest darkness, "Be not afraid; I am with thee; no man shall set on thee to hurt thee; I have much people in this city;" and let him still, in spite of disappointment and fruitless toil, once more let down his net for a draught.

SECTION LXXXVI.

CHAP. XVIII. 12—18. *And when Gallio was the deputy of Achaia, the Jews made insurrection with one accord against Paul, and brought him to the judgment-seat, saying, This fellow persuadeth men to worship God contrary to the law. And when Paul was now about to open his mouth, Gallio said unto the Jews, If it were a matter of wrong or wicked lewdness, O ye Jews, reason would that I should bear with you: but if it be a question of words and names, and of your law, look ye to it: for I will be no judge of such matters. And he drave them from the judgment-seat. Then all the Greeks took Sosthenes, the chief ruler of the synagogue, and beat him before the judgment-seat: and Gallio cared for none of those things. And Paul after this tarried there yet a good while, and then took his leave of the brethren, and sailed thence into Syria, and with him Priscilla and Aquila; having shorn his head in Cenchrea: for he had a vow.*

GALLIO, who is mentioned here as the deputy, or rather the proconsul of the province, is generally

believed to have been the brother of the celebrated writer and philosopher Seneca, in whose writings we find such an advance in ethics and morality beyond his age, so many maxims of almost Christian benevolence and good-will, such indications of a purer source of truth than the mere fountains of Grecian philosophy or Roman science, that one can hardly help believing that he had access, perhaps, to some Christian as well as Jewish writings, that he may have known and conversed with many a convert to the Christian faith both of Jew and Gentile, and that he and his brother Gallio may have often talked of that period of the latter's life when Paul dwelt and preached in Corinth, and was dragged in a tumultuous insurrection before his own judgment-seat. I fear, however, we must admit that neither Seneca, any more than Gallio, cared for any of these things: they may have looked upon them with a philosophic eye, discussed them in a philosophic spirit, considered them as curious and interesting phases or developments of the human mind, and then dismissed them with the calm indifference of men who had no personal interest in such questions.

There are many Gallios in the world; and the name of this proconsul has become, in the Christian world, a sort of embodiment of indifferentism, and quiet, easy repudiation of everything that may ruffle the calm waves of their good-natured social existence, whether of a religious

or political character. They are a sort of persons that wish to drift down the current of life with as easy a sail as can be carried, and pride themselves on that impartial tone, which ignores alike every section in the Church and every party in the State; true alone to the one principle of letting everything have its own course and interfering with none.

We are hardly, perhaps, justified in assigning such a character to Gallio himself, though his name has become sponsor to this class; at any rate, we can see much providential interposition in the circumstance of such a man being the chief magistrate at Corinth at this period of persecution. Had he been, like Felix, "willing to do the Jews a pleasure," he might have delivered up Paul to their jurisdiction; had he been like Pilate, he might have yielded to their tumultuous clamour; had he prided himself on what he might have deemed his strict impartiality, he might, while he rescued Paul from violence, have yet forbidden his further preaching, or even banished him from the city. He did nothing of the kind; he simply declared that no offence had been committed against the Roman law to authorise or call for his interference, and he would have nothing to do with what he somewhat contemptuously called a question of words and names and Jewish law. And with this decision he unceremoniously hurried the complainants out of court.

There is considerable difficulty in ascertaining who the parties were that are named in the seventeenth verse. In the eighth verse we read of Crispus, chief ruler of the synagogue, being converted to the faith, and with all his household becoming members of the Christian Church. It is probable that the Sosthenes mentioned in this verse had been chosen ruler of the synagogue in the room of Crispus, and, like many with newly-acquired authority, had signalised his appointment to office by peculiar vehemence and forwardness in this charge against Paul; and that the Greeks, who both hated Jews, and were favourers of the Christian party, seeing how matters went before the proconsul's tribunal, took advantage of his easiness, and seizing Sosthenes, ere he could retire to a place of safety, inflicted on him the rude retaliation of that scourging to which he would, in all probability, have subjected Paul, and that even before the eyes of Gallio, who, characteristically enough, perhaps smiled at, but most certainly, at any rate, did not care for, the outrage that Sosthenes had received.*

We do not know the exact period of Paul's

* The difficulty in some measure has arisen from the name of Sosthenes being united by Paul with his own in his salutation to the Corinthian Church as a brother. (1 Cor. i. 1.) One can hardly believe this "brother" to be the same with the Sosthenes mentioned in this chapter, and if they were different individuals, then the difficulty vanishes.

residence at Corinth; it probably exceeded two years, and we have to bless God for our portion of its fruits in those two Epistles, which the Holy Spirit has indited and preserved for the edification and comfort of his Church in every age. The next few verses crowd a vast deal both of time and travel into a very small compass. A hurried visit to Ephesus, a voyage to Cæsarea, from thence to Jerusalem—once more to Antioch, a retracing of his former journey through Galatia and Phrygia, till we again find the Apostle fulfilling his promise to revisit Ephesus, "if God willed." *

* I would allude in a note rather than in the text to the circumstance mentioned in the 18th verse of "the shaving of the head" on the expiration of a Nazarite vow, and which has been generally ascribed to Paul, as if *he* had taken that vow. This has always seemed to me so inconsistent with Paul's character, as the Apostle of the uncircumcision, and so at variance with what we should expect from him in this Gentile city, and amid its heathen population, and so likely to be misconstrued by them, that I cannot but adopt the suggestion of Mr. Howson, and which indeed the grammatical construction of the sentence fully warrants, that Aquila, and not Paul, had bound himself by this vow. We have before suggested that Aquila was probably not a Christian convert when he came to Corinth, and it is therefore possible that in the perils and perplexities which surrounded him at Rome in consequence of the Claudian decree he might bind himself by such a vow for a certain period, if himself and his wife escaped unhurt from their present difficulties.

SECTION LXXXVII.

CHAP. XVIII. 19—28. *And he came to Ephesus, and left them there: but he himself entered into the synagogue, and reasoned with the Jews. When they desired him to tarry longer time with them, he consented not: but bade them farewell, saying, I must by all means keep this feast that cometh in Jerusalem: but I will return again unto you, if God will. And he sailed from Ephesus. And when he had landed at Cesarea, and gone up, and saluted the Church, he went down to Antioch. And after he had spent some time there, he departed, and went over all the country of Galatia and Phrygia in order, strengthening all the disciples. And a certain Jew, named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man, and mighty in the Scriptures, came to Ephesus. This man was instructed in the way of the Lord; and, being fervent in the Spirit, he spake and taught diligently the things of the Lord, knowing only the baptism of John. And he began to speak boldly in the synagogue: whom when Aquila and Priscilla had heard, they took him unto them, and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly. And when he was disposed to pass into Achaia, the brethren wrote, exhorting the disciples to receive him: who, when he was come, helped them much which had believed through grace: for he mightily convinced the Jews, and that publicly, shewing by the Scriptures that Jesus was Christ.*

AT the close of the last Section I gave a summary, almost as brief as the narrative itself, of the various events which occurred, and the places which Paul visited between his leaving Corinth

and his return to Ephesus the second time. It may be worth while to retrace the incidents of this period at somewhat greater length.

The motive which induced the Apostle at this time to leave Corinth was his great desire, it may be from some Divine communication, to revisit Jerusalem at the great national festival of the Passover. He knew, indeed, that the Passover had fulfilled its purpose, that the true Paschal lamb had been slain, and that there was no need to look any more through the dim and shadowy type for the substance of good things already come. But a long time had elapsed since he had been at Jerusalem—not since he had gone there with Barnabas and Titus, as a deputation from Antioch on the Circumcision question; and no doubt many a natural desire arose in his heart, many a yearning instinct, which the Lord implants or assuredly does not forbid, to revisit the scenes and associates of earlier years. But Paul had far higher objects, no doubt, connected with the great purpose of his life. He had done much and suffered much since he was last in Jerusalem: Europe as well as Asia had had the Gospel preached: the words of Jesus to Paul had been literally fulfilled, "I will send thee *far hence* unto the Gentiles," and he might wish to recount to his brethren the great things God had already done, and take counsel with them for the future.

Paul therefore sailed to Ephesus with his companions Aquila and Priscilla from Cenchrea, the celebrated port of Corinth, about eight miles from the city, on his way through Cæsarea to Jerusalem.

A question here very naturally occurs, what had become of Silas and Timotheus? They had, we know, to the Apostle's great rejoicing and refreshment, joined him at Corinth. But from that hour we hear no more of them, while the Apostle continued there; we know, indeed, that Timotheus was a "work-fellow" of Paul's there, for his name is mentioned as such in the Epistle to the Romans, and we afterwards meet him again as associated with the Apostle in his third journey. But of Silas we hear no more; he is indeed honourably mentioned by Paul, under his Roman name, in his letters to the Thessalonians, "Paul and Sylvanus and Timotheus unto the Church of the Thessalonians;" and in writing at a later period to the Corinthians, he speaks of Sylvanus as having been associated with him in preaching the Gospel to them, "Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by us, even by me, and Sylvanus and Timotheus;" and once more he is spoken of by St. Peter in terms of commendation as "a faithful brother" to those very churches, some of which he and Paul in all probability had planted. One cannot doubt that, like his coadjutors Paul and Timo-

theus, Silas continued "faithful" even unto death. One cannot for a moment believe that he ever ceased to deliver that message which he had received from the Lord Jesus Christ. And though no human record testifies of his labours, though no memorial of love or gratitude points out where his bones were laid, and we know nothing of the close of his lengthened labours and sufferings for the Gospel's sake—his name is written in heaven.

Though Paul's stay at Ephesus was so short, he would yet scatter seed wherever he went, and so he went into the synagogue there, and reasoned with the Jews; and so acceptable were the preacher's words that they were anxious to detain him longer among them. But Jerusalem and its approaching Passover were on his heart, and, therefore, with a promise that, if it were the Lord's will, he would return to them, and, leaving Aquila and Priscilla behind, he hastened on to Cæsarea, little dreaming that ere long that city would be the scene of his own lengthened imprisonment.

Luke's narrative gives us no account of the visit to Jerusalem: it is not even named; we are left only to conjecture that, when the historian says, "he went up and saluted the Church," he means Jerusalem and the Church there. One might wish, as one often does in Scripture narratives, that some more details had been given of

events in which we feel a deep interest, but over which the Spirit of God has purposely drawn a veil. But the great end of these apostolic annals is to record the Gospel's progress; how it "stretched forth the curtains of its habitations, lengthened its cords, and strengthened its stakes;" and, like the waters of the Prophet's vision, how it increased from the tiny, shallow brook to the overflowing river that could not be passed. And so we are hurried on to that visit of the Apostle to Ephesus, so abundant in interest and incident, and which, besides the harvest of the Apostle's own sowing and reaping, has bequeathed to us its best legacy and inheritance in that Epistle to the Ephesians, in which we have such manifestations both of the doctrines which he preached, and of the affectionate earnestness and love with which he urged them.

Before, however, he reached Ephesus, he tarried some time at Antioch, the scene of so many labours, of so many joys, and not a few sorrows. It is the last time this city is named; but it is worth remark that its chief interest now is, not because it was the Imperial city of Syria, and was pre-eminent for the sumptuous magnificence of its buildings, its luxury, and its wealth, but because it is associated with the name of the once-despised Paul, and because it first gave the honoured and world-wide name of Christians to the disciples of a crucified Redeemer.

The events which had occurred in Ephesus during the interval between Paul's first and second visit will best find a place in the ensuing section.

SECTION LXXXVIII.

CHAP. XIX. 1—7. *And it came to pass, that, while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul having passed through the upper coasts came to Ephesus, and finding certain disciples, he said unto them, Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed? And they said unto him, We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost. And he said unto them, Unto what then were ye baptized? And they said, Unto John's baptism. Then said Paul, John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus. When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them; and they spake with tongues, and prophesied. And all the men were about twelve.*

PAUL, having made in regular order a systematic visitation of those Churches in Galatia and Phrygia, and most probably through the regions of Lycaonia and Cilicia also, which he had so successfully planted a few years before, for the purpose of confirming and establishing them in the faith as it was in Jesus, as well as strengthening the disciples individually against those innovating doctrines and customs which he was so

painfully aware were already secretly at work to undermine the truth, had now reached Ephesus in fulfilment of his promise. He had left Aquila and Priscilla there, and no doubt found them still there on his return.

But, though we do not read that Aquila took any public office or part in the ministry during his absence, we know that he was most beneficially instrumental in instructing one who became a burning and a shining light in the Church, and an eminent instrument in the hands of God in mightily convincing the Jews out of their own Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ, and thus preparing the ground and awakening men's expectations and longings for the coming of the Apostle himself. This was the Apollos mentioned in the last chapter—an Alexandrian Jew—and, as such, conversant with and thoroughly instructed in the Word of God, as well as in all the learning and philosophy of his age.

We know so little of his antecedent life that we are unable to say when and where he had become acquainted with the baptism of John. He might have been, and most probably was, one of those who had heard John preach in the wilderness, and speak of One that was to come after him, and that Jesus was He that should come, and that they had no need to look for another; and he had believed, and had been baptized of John unto the baptism of repentance. But, in all probability, he had

heard little more, and knew little more of what had since occurred; and thus, though he might preach Jesus, he could not preach Jesus and the Resurrection, the pouring out of the Holy Ghost, and the miraculous gifts connected with it, and the ministration of the Spirit, nor that baptism, ordained by Christ Himself, in the Name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. But what he knew he was willing to communicate; he was faithful in that which was least, and therefore unto him were committed also the true riches of Christ; and Aquila and Priscilla were the Lord's agents in the bestowal of this gift.

I would just make one remark, by the way, on the spirit of Christian brotherhood with which this pious couple seem to have met and welcomed Apollos. I do not say there was error in his doctrine, as far as it went; there was undoubtedly imperfection in it; it lacked that unction and that gift of prophesying which were among the especial boons of the Holy Ghost to the Apostles and followers of the Lord Jesus; and one might not have been surprised had Aquila felt somewhat of what the beloved John felt when he said to Jesus, "Master! we found one casting out devils in thy name, and we forbade him, because he followeth not us;" and Jesus replied, "Forbid him not, for there is no man which shall do a miracle in my name that can lightly speak evil of me." But the heart of Aquila at once yearned towards Apollos with all

the warmth of a brother's feelings; no spirit of envy or jealousy, no pride of his own attainments, no depreciation of a brother's, but, "fulfilling the law of Christ," at once welcomed him to his heart and home, and there, in all the fulness of Christian love, "expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly." Oh! that there were more of such a spirit of love among ourselves, and less of bitterness and acrimony, "bearing the infirmities of the weak," not lording it over our brethren, but building one another up more affectionately in our common faith, and agreeing to differ with all Christian love and peace. "When a man is out of charity with his brother, he shows that God is out of charity with him."*

It would appear that this case of Apollos was no solitary one, and that on Paul's arrival at Ephesus he found twelve men, probably from Alexandria also, who, like Apollos, had been only baptized unto the baptism of John. They had believed that Jesus, whom John announced as the Messiah of God, was indeed the promised Saviour, and might, therefore, call themselves, as well as be accounted disciples, though not received into the Church by the ordinance of Christian baptism in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. One is apt at first sight to be startled at the amount of ignorance, which is implied in the answer of these men to Paul, that "they had not

* Secker's Nonsuch Professor.

so much as heard whether there were any Holy Ghost:" and we are almost inclined to ask with the surprise of Jesus at Nicodemus, "Art thou a Jew, and yet knowest not this?" Had they never heard their own Master's words, "I, indeed, baptize you with water unto repentance, but He that cometh after me is mightier than I—He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire." Their very answer, therefore, seems rather to indicate their meaning than their ignorance. "If these men," says Bishop Pearson, "were Gentiles, it is no wonder they never heard of the Holy Ghost, because they never had that notion in their religion; if they were Jews, as they seem to be, their meaning is, not that they had never heard of the Spirit of God, but only that they had not heard of that giving of it, which the Apostle mentioned:" and then the Bishop quotes that expression of the Evangelist John, as illustrating the case, that "the Holy Ghost was not yet given, because that Jesus was not yet glorified," Adding, "not denying the existence, but the plentiful effusion of the Spirit."

It is evident from the result that the gift of the Holy Ghost to which the Apostle referred, and which followed the imposition of his hands, was not the inward and spiritual work of grace regenerating their hearts, but the outward and extraordinary gift of speaking with tongues and prophesying.

One cannot, however, but fear that even now in this nineteenth century, in Christian England, with all our abundance of Bibles and churches, and ministers and schools, far more than twelve might be found in London, or in any of our towns, aye, too, and in our little villages and rural hamlets, who, if questioned as to the Holy Ghost, would have to reply in the words, and in their literal meaning, too, that they had not so much as heard whether there were any Holy Ghost, and who, so far from knowing anything of His work in renewing and sanctifying and cleansing man's guilty and polluted heart, know not even of His existence. And yet, as plain as words can speak it, it is expressly declared that if any man, be he who he may, learned and eloquent as Apollos, or whosoever he be, if he have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His.

SECTION LXXXIX.

CHAP. XIX. 8—16. *And he went into the synagogue, and spake boldly for the space of three months, disputing and persuading the things concerning the kingdom of God. But when divers were hardened, and believed not, but spake evil of that way before the multitude, he departed from them, and separated the disciples, disputing daily in the school of one Tyrannus. And this continued by the space of two years; so that all they which dwelt in Asia*

heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks. And God wrought special miracles by the hands of Paul: so that from his body were brought unto the sick handkerchiefs, or aprons, and the diseases departed from them, and the evil spirits went out of them. Then certain of the vagabond Jews, exorcists, took upon them to call over them which had evil spirits the name of the Lord Jesus, saying, We adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preacheth. And there were seven sons of one Sceva, a Jew, and chief of the priests, which did so. And the evil spirit answered and said, Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are ye? and the man in whom the evil spirit was leaped on them, and overcame them, and prevailed against them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded.

It had been God's injunction to his prophet Ezekiel, "Son of man, I send thee to the children of Israel; and they, whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear, for they are a rebellious house, shall yet know that there hath been a prophet among them." This was strikingly illustrated wherever Paul's mission of love and mercy led him; wherever he went, into whatsoever city he entered, the synagogue was the first spot he sought, and there he reasoned with the Jews, proving from their own Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ, and in some few instances "mightily convincing them." For a season, a short season, they would hear; it was so especially at Ephesus, perhaps for a longer period than at any other place. We read here that "for the space of three months he went boldly into the synagogue, disputing and persuading the things concerning the kingdom of God."

An Apostle—and that Apostle Paul—preaching for three months in all boldness, and yet at the close of that period "divers were hardened, and believed not, and spake evil of that way before the multitude!" How truly did Satan set a stumbling-block in the way of the Jews—how judicially were their eyes blinded, and their ears stopped, and their hearts hardened, and the preacher that should have been a savour of life unto life unto them became only a savour of death unto death!

The preachers of the Gospel are often taunted with their inadequate teaching; it is in these days with our congregations as it was with the schools of ancient Rome, where, as the satirist tells us,* it was all laid to the fault of the teacher, because stupidity, dulness, obstinacy, and vice so often prevailed amid the classes he taught, and so little of heroism, generosity, and virtue glowed in the hearts of his pupils. And yet Paul preached for three months every day in the same synagogue, and the Holy Spirit has significantly left on record of the majority of those to whom he preached, that divers were hardened and believed not, and then threw all the blame on the preacher and his doctrines by speaking evil of that way before the multitude. But was the Gospel therefore ineffectual, or the Apostle's ministry in vain,

* Culpa docentis
Scilicet arguitur, quod læva in parte mamillæ
Nil salit Arcadico juveni.—*Juvenal, Sat.* vii. 158-9.

or was his voice to be silenced because men would not hear? No; "whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear"—Christ must still be preached; and so Paul, separating himself from the unbelieving and gainsaying Jews and their synagogues, henceforth availed himself for daily discussion of the school or lecture-room of some heathen sophist, who had probably become a convert to the faith under the Apostle's teaching.

Paul's ministry at Ephesus, and that continued through a space of between two and three years, is a striking illustration of what a Christian minister can do, and of what many a one, following in the Apostle's steps, has often done. It is the only place where we are so intimately admitted, as it were, into the interior, and get so close a glance of Paul's ministerial life, not only in his daily public disputations in the school of Tyrannus, but in his more private and pastoral walk among them, in his house-to-house visitations. And I think, too, we find it implied in this chapter, that in all probability Ephesus was only the radius of an extended district, and whether Paul himself occasionally went forth on these missionary excursions or directed those of others, still the result was that the word of the Lord Jesus was proclaimed and heard by all that dwelt in that region. The Gospel was brought within reach of all,—it was offered to all, and it

is expressly said here, was "heard of all," whether Jews or Greeks; but, alas! it is not added, "and was received of all." It was the command of Jesus himself, "Go ye into all the world and *preach* the Gospel to every creature;" that is the duty—let the name of Jesus be proclaimed in every land, let the offer of salvation through His name be heard by every ear, and man's duty is then fulfilled, "whether men will hear or whether they will forbear."

Nor did the Lord leave his servant without that manifestation of his presence and power with him, which he had promised, working especial miracles by the hands of Paul. And as in a former passage we found that the very shadow of Peter passing was effectual to heal; so an handkerchief, or a napkin, or a shawl, or an apron that had been touched by Paul as miraculously cured. The Lord gives efficacy to his servant's work or withholds it, as it seemeth him best. When Elisha sent his staff by the hand of Gehazi, it was powerless to raise the widow's son, and yet here the garments that an apostle had touched, had a commission given to them to heal.

It was, however, with Paul at Ephesus, as with Moses at the court of Pharaoh where sorcerers and magicians were in a measure permitted and enabled by their imitations to mislead as to the power by which Moses wrought. And as

Ephesus was especially the centre and focus of magical incantation and science, Paul was probably looked upon by many only as one of superior art and skill. An incident, however, occurred, not unlike that at Philippi, in which an evil spirit was compelled, by an impulse not his own, to bear unwilling and unwitting testimony to the power by which Paul acted. Even in our Lord's time the Jews had been much addicted to this practice of exorcism or expelling of evil spirits. "If I," says Jesus in answer to one of their charges, "by Beelzebub cast out devils, by whom do your sons cast them out?" and at another time John reported to his master, that they had seen one casting out devils in his name. This practice was unhappily prevalent at Ephesus, and through Satan's instrumentality may have had such a semblance of success as to foster delusion, and what was still more material, depreciate the real character of the apostolic miracles; as Paul calls them, "deceitful workers" transforming themselves into the Apostles of Christ, as Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. It was, however, effectually checked, and that without the interposition of the Apostle, as at Philippi. There was a strange mixture of credulity and incredulity, of imposture and veracity in the act recorded of these young men. They were evidently no converts to

the faith in Jesus, no friends nor associates of Paul, and yet their language is "We adjure you by Jesus, whom Paul preacheth," as if they had got hold of some incantation or cabalistic charm more powerful than ordinary wherewith to work. No doubt, too, these men exercised their art from mercenary motives, and were thus bringing into discredit the disinterested conduct of the Apostle, whose own hands ministered not only to his own necessities, but to those of his fellow-workers; and as if, too, the gift of God could be purchased with money. The words, and the meaning of the words, used by the evil spirit in answer, may be, and perhaps were, purposely meant to be ambiguous, as some have supposed, but the act itself has no ambiguity about it; and the evil spirit was forced to testify to the knowledge of the name of Jesus, and the power by which Paul wrought, and yet so far from colluding as before with these instruments of Satan, he was forced by a power beyond his own to repudiate them as hypocrites and impostors, and inflict signal punishment on their impious daring.

SECTION XC.

CHAP. XIX. 17—20. *And this was known to all the Jews and Greeks also dwelling at Ephesus: and fear fell on them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified. And many that believed came, and confessed, and shewed their deeds. Many of them also which used curious arts brought their books together, and burned them before all men: and they counted the price of them, and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver. So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed.*

MILTON calls "ambition, the last infirmity of noble minds." I am not quite sure that I understand what he means by '*the last*' infirmity. Probably, as it is the earliest, so it may linger last and latest; but, whatever may be the character of ambition, the love of money and of gain is the base infirmity of the meanest mind, and, in this sense, it is the last also. For, however other passions may weaken and decay, this grows in intensity to the last, and, when almost every other spark that betokens life is extinct, this still flickers, and even with the dying breath gives utterance to its presence in the heart.

We find in this chapter two very striking illustrations, of the love of gain in the one instance, and the grace of God triumphing over it in the other. We have to do with the latter first. Ephesus, like the Syrian Antioch, was conspi-

cuous for its superstitions, its soothsayers, astrologers, fortune-tellers, wizards, and sorcerers. The banks of the Cayister, like those of the Orontes, swarmed with them; and it would seem that in the former city it had been reduced to a regular science, and was taught and learned in all its mystic characters by professors of the art; that they had their books of initiation as well as of maturer science, in which both the tyro and the adept might study. Amulets and charms, engraven with mysterious symbols, were openly sold and traded in, and many a legend from earliest times recorded the power and efficacy of these "Ephesian Letters." *

Mr. Lewin, in his "Life and Epistles of St. Paul," has quoted one of them from an ancient writer,† and one can only feel humiliation and sorrow that even at this day, in Christian England, in this age of enlightenment and education, the same miserable jargon is often employed by supposed wizards, or "wise men," as they call themselves, to entrap the credulous and ignorant. Solomon, long ago, long before Ephesian charmers or English wizards, said there was nothing new under the sun; and England and Ephesus alike illustrate his saying: or, perhaps, we should more truly say that the heart of man, unrenewed by the grace, and unillumined by the knowledge, of God,

* Εφεσια γραμματα.

† Aski Kataski Lix Tetrax Damnameneus Aision.

and groping its own way in the midst of darkness, is just as weak and corrupt, and as easily led away of Satan, now in the nineteenth century as it was from the very first; and that, without the teaching of the Holy Spirit, it is as ignorant of the truth of God, and as ready and willing to believe a lie, as when the King of Moab sent for Balaam to come and curse Israel for him, or Saul sought of the Witch of Endor to divine unto him by her familiar spirit.

Let us, however, return to the case first put before us, in which the grace of God triumphed over the love of gain. The incident of the evil spirit ill-treating and wounding the seven Jews, who had sought to cast him out for their own purposes and gain, could not but be extensively known and canvassed. Like the magicians at the Court of Pharaoh, they could not but own that "this was the finger of God;" it would show to these Ephesian incantators that there was a power far beyond any they could wield—a Name more sacred than any they dared to summon—and the result was that great fear fell on them all, and that Name, the Name of the Lord Jesus, whom Paul preached, was magnified among them.

It would appear, too, that some of those who practised these curious arts had, like Simon Magus, become converts to the faith, though they had not altogether renounced that association with old habits and practices which still lingered in their hearts, and made them unwilling to part

with their books of science, and for which they had probably given a large sum. They might not intend to use them any more, but they still kept them, and might think that they had attained to no small measure of faith and obedience in putting them, as it were, carefully by, out of sight and out of reach. It was still the stump of Dagon left upon its pedestal. But where the work of the Spirit is begun in any heart, it will not be carried on deceitfully nor by half-measure. It claims, and it will have, the whole heart; no partial surrender, no compromise, no parleying nor dallying, no looking back on the Sodom from which they have come out; no turning back, nor even thought of doing so, after the hand has once been put to the plough. "Not a hoof must be left behind"—not even the stump of Dagon left. "If you would not gather the forbidden fruit, beware of looking on the tree where it grows; if Achan handle the golden wedge, his next step will be to steal it."

It was, therefore, a great test and trial of grace in these Ephesian converts that they could no longer rest content with that measure of forbearance, which had put their books, as it were, under lock and key. Even thus, they were still in existence, and might become a snare to their own souls, or, when they themselves were in their graves and unconscious of the mischief, might be again drawn forth to the injury of those that should come after them. And Christian charity, as it would

lay no stumbling-block in a brother's path, so neither would it leave one for a future generation to fall over. No doubt Satan would be at hand to suggest many a plausible reason why they might rest content in parting with them themselves—that God did not require such a sacrifice at their hands as their total destruction—that their duty to their own families enjoined a different course—that they were curious and rare and valuable, and there were many to whom the purchase would be acceptable.

But, no; the work of grace was complete; they brought the books and perhaps laid them at the Apostle's feet—at any rate in the sight of all, in the hearing of all, they testified their abhorrence and rejection of such pernicious arts, that they would no longer "touch the accursed thing," and that henceforth they would come out from the midst of such, and be separate; and accordingly "they burned them before all." Even as regarded this world's interests, it was no small surrender; some had the curiosity to cast up the value of what had been offered for conscience-sake on the Lord's altar, and it was computed at fifty thousand pieces of silver—probably from 1,500*l.* to 2,000*l.* of our money.* Well might

* If the pieces of silver were shekels, or 2*s.* 4½*d.*, the value of the whole would be 5,000*l.*; if drachmæ, or 7¾*d.*, 1,600*l.* Mr. Howson, however, reckons the drachma of the Levant at 10*d.*, which would raise the value to 2,000*l.*

the historian add of this work and triumph of God's grace over two of the most powerful motives of the human heart, superstition and the love of money, "so mightily grew the Word of God and prevailed."

SECTION XCI.

CHAP. XIX. 21—41. *After these things were ended, Paul purposed in the spirit, when he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia, to go to Jerusalem, saying, After I have been there, I must also see Rome. So he sent into Macedonia two of them that ministered unto him, Timotheus and Erastus: but he himself stayed in Asia for a season. And the same time there arose no small stir about that way. For a certain man, named Demetrius, a silversmith, which made silver shrines for Diana, brought no small gain unto the craftsmen; whom he called together with the workmen of like occupation, and said, Sirs, ye know that by this craft we have our wealth: moreover, ye see and hear, that not alone at Ephesus, but almost throughout all Asia, this Paul hath persuaded and turned away much people, saying that they be no gods which are made with hands: so that not only this our craft is in danger to be set at nought; but also that the temple of the great goddess Diana should be despised, and her magnificence should be destroyed, whom all Asia and the world worshippeth. And when they heard these sayings, they were full of wrath, and cried out, saying, Great is Diana of the Ephesians. And the whole city was filled with confusion: and having caught Gaius and Aristarchus, men of Macedonia, Paul's companions in travel, they rushed with one accord into the theatre. And*

when Paul would have entered in unto the people, the disciples suffered him not. And certain of the chief of Asia, which were his friends, sent unto him, desiring him that he would not adventure himself into the theatre. Some therefore cried one thing, and some another: for the assembly was confused; and the more part knew not wherefore they were come together. And they drew Alexander out of the multitude, the Jews putting him forward. And Alexander beckoned with the hand, and would have made his defence unto the people. But when they knew that he was a Jew, all with one voice, about the space of two hours, cried out, Great is Diana of the Ephesians. And when the town-clerk had appeased the people, he said, Ye men of Ephesus, what man is there that knoweth not how that the city of the Ephesians is a worshipper of the great goddess Diana, and of the image which fell down from Jupiter? Seeing then that these things cannot be spoken against, ye ought to be quiet, and to do nothing rashly. For ye have brought hither these men, which are neither robbers of churches, nor yet blasphemers of your goddess. Wherefore if Demetrius, and the craftsmen which are with him, have a matter against any man, the law is open, and there are deputies: led them implead one another. But if ye enquire any thing concerning other matters, it shall be determined in a lawful assembly. For we are in danger to be called in question for this day's uproar, there being no cause whereby we may give an account of this concourse. And when he had thus spoken, he dismissed the assembly.

It has been generally supposed that when Paul in his first Epistle to the Corinthians refers, metaphorically indeed, and according to the figure of speech among men, to having "fought with beasts at Ephesus" (1 Cor. xv. 32), he is alluding to this day's uproar and tumult in the matter

of Demetrius and the silversmiths. It does not, however, appear that on this occasion the Apostle himself was at any moment exposed to any personal danger or collision with his opponents; and, therefore, whatever may be the meaning or extent of the expression "fighting with beasts," which the Apostle uses, I am inclined to refer it to the general opposition and virulence he met with during the three years of his Ephesian sojourn, though Luke, in his brief narrative, makes no allusion to any, and not to this outbreak at the very close, in which, after all, there seems to have been far more noise than violence, and in which, as in most other popular commotions, the majority of the crowd knew neither the cause nor the purpose of the disturbance, but were content, at the top of their voices, to swell the senseless cry of "Great is Diana of the Ephesians."

It was altogether a heathen tumult; in other places the Jewish portion of the population seem to have stirred up the people against the Christian missionaries, but here, whatever their previous conduct and efforts may have been, or even the present bias of their minds, the Jews, as opponents of idol-worship, seem to have been as unpopular as the Christians, and perhaps, in this day's work, were assumed by the mob to be alike implicated in the dishonour done to their goddess. It is evident that self-interest, and that of a few,

was at the bottom of all this opposition. Paul's offence was that his doctrines interfered, not with the veneration paid to Diana, but with the gains coming to Demetrius, who, with his fellow-workmen, were carrying on a most popular and lucrative trade in the manufacture and sale of silver models of the shrine, in which the image of their goddess was kept. They foresaw, clearly enough, in the progress which these new doctrines were making, and in the sacrifices its converts had already made, a clear indication, that unless checked, even Diana, with all the traditions of her heaven-sent image, would lose her credit before these novel preachers.

There is no cry so easy to be raised as a fanatic cry; no passion so easily stimulated or simulated as a religious one, or so difficult to be allayed when once excited. As the cry of this multitude resounded through the streets of Ephesus hour after hour, "Great is Diana"—as once before on the heights of Carmel the priests of Baal shouted out from morn till noon, and from noon till the time of the evening sacrifice, "O, Baal! hear us," one might almost have given credit to the feelings of the people, that Diana was in reality the moving impulse of their hearts' affections, as her name was the key-note of their cry, did we not see Demetrius and his party so busy among the crowd.

We are told that this image of Diana, so

venerated, so held in honour in Ephesus, as if, like her temple, it was one of the wonders of the world, or as if, like the Palladium of Minerva, its presence ensured safety and protection, was in reality the most shapeless, ungainly wooden imitation of the human form and face, so as to give rise to the poor jest that Jupiter had expelled it from heaven for its misshapen ugliness. One is often led to ask oneself the question, why, in almost every land of Pagan idolatry, the idols of its worship are invariably such representations of hideousness, deformity, and abortion. The answer, I suppose, is that they are embodiments of all that is disgusting, repulsive, and obscene; that the beings, whom under these supposed resemblances they worship, are in reality hideous and terrific, that the religion of Paganism and idolatry, the worship of demons, has nothing to do with the constraining love of the object they profess to serve, but that its foundation is terror, its principle darkness, and its ruling passion the indulgence of every low and grovelling desire. The fable of King Log is but an humiliating satire on the degradation and corruption, and the depths of baseness, to which the soul of man has by nature sunk, and can sink, when left to itself under the debasing sway and dominion of Satan and his fellow-devils.

The uproar at Ephesus was at length stilled by the judicious interference of the public officer.

The crowd had rushed into the theatre, or place of public resort for judicial and other civic matters, dragging with them two of Paul's companions; and, no doubt, for a time their lives were in imminent danger; and Paul, with his usual forgetfulness of self, would have entered the theatre to try and calm the excitement, had he not been stopped by the assurance of those who wished him well, that his presence would only add to the disturbance. It was a striking testimony to the character of Paul and his fellow-labourers, which even from the mouth of their adversaries was unintentionally given them; they were not only acquitted of every charge by the highest officer of the city, that in no way and by no act had they done anything to bring themselves within the pale of public prosecution for any sacrilege or violation of the sanctity of their temple; but that, as Demetrius himself acknowledged, the whole front of their offence was, that not only at Ephesus, but throughout almost all the adjoining district of Asia, this Paul had persuaded much people, that those were no gods which were made by men's hands. And thus ended the day's uproar in the proud city of Ephesus.*

* The classical student will, no doubt, be reminded by this scene in the Theatre at Ephesus of that well-known simile of Virgil, when the storm is hushed by the presence of Neptune:—

SECTION XCII.

CHAP. XX. 1—12. *And after the uproar was ceased, Paul called unto him the disciples, and embraced them, and departed for to go into Macedonia. And when he had gone over those parts, and had given them much exhortation, he came into Greece, and there abode three months: and when the Jews laid wait for him, as he was about to sail into Syria, he purposed to return through Macedonia. And there accompanied him into Asia, Sopater of Berea; and of the Thessalonians, Aristarchus and Secundus; and Gaius of Derbe, and Timotheus; and of Asia, Tychicus and Trophimus. These, going before, tarried for us at Troas. And we sailed away from Philippi after the days of unleavened bread, and came unto them to Troas in five days; where we abode seven days. And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow, and continued his speech until midnight. And there were many lights in the upper chamber, where they were gathered together. And there sat in a window a certain young man named Eutychus, being fallen into a deep sleep: and as Paul was long preaching, he sunk down with sleep, and fell down from the third loft, and was taken up dead. And Paul went down, and fell on him, and, embracing him, said, Trouble not yourselves; for his life is in him. When he therefore was come up*

Ac, veluti magno in populo cum sæpe coorta est
Seditio, sævitque animis ignobile vulgus;
Jamque faces et saxa volant, furor arma ministrat:
Tum, pietate gravem, ac meritis si fortè virum quem
Conspexere, silent; arrectisque auribus adstant:
Ille regit dictis animos, et pectora mulcet.

—*Æn., lib.* 1, *l.* 148.

again, and had broken bread, and eaten, and talked a long while, even till break of day, so he departed. And they brought the young man alive, and were not a little comforted.

PAUL's departure from Ephesus was no hurried flight, no precipitate escape from malignant enemies pursuing at his heels. It is true, there were enemies fierce as wild beasts, who would gladly have devoured him; and the Apostle seems to have felt, and may possibly have had some divine communication also, that his work at Ephesus was, for the present at least, closed, and that there was work elsewhere to which the Lord was calling him. But still, as at Philippi, Paul would not compromise his character nor dignity, as a messenger of the Most High, by any unseemly concealment of his purpose, or secret departure from a city where he had boldly preached the truth in Jesus, and had not ceased for the space of three years to warn every one night and day.

He had, indeed, during the uproar of that one memorable day, in deference to the counsels and wishes of his friends, forborne to venture into the theatre, and needlessly expose himself to danger; but, after the disturbance had ceased, with calm dignity and undaunted demeanour Paul once more summoned the disciples and converts, probably in their old place of meeting in the lecture-room of Tyrannus, and communicating to them his intended departure, and embracing every one,

bade them an affectionate farewell, and so quitted Ephesus to retrace his steps amid the Churches he had planted in Macedonia, at Philippi, at Thessalonica, and perhaps in Berea also.

There can be little doubt from the numerous hints scattered in St. Paul's Epistles, written about this period, to the Corinthians, the Galatians, and the Romans, that this portion of the Apostle's missionary labours, though summed up by the historian in the ambiguous perplexed brevity of the earlier verses of this chapter, was probably the most important, the most active and incessant, the most extended, as well as the most interesting of any. It is not, however, the purport of these domestic expositions to unravel, or gather up to any extent, the incidents suggested elsewhere, except so far as may be necessary to give a continuous character to the history as we have it here before us. It would, no doubt, be highly interesting to have re-entered Philippi with the Apostle once more, though we might have missed the friends of the earlier visit. Lydia was, no doubt, gone back to Thyatira, "bearing precious seed with her;" and the gaoler, too, might be gone—his conversion to Christianity would be no recommendation to his employers, and he might have sought safety and subsistence elsewhere; but the Spirit of God has thrown a veil over all, nor will it be lifted up till that day, when "we shall know even as we are known."

We next find the Apostle in Greece; induced by intelligence from Corinth he appears to have earnestly longed to revisit that scene of his labours, and though hindered hitherto* by circumstances, and by motives of kindness to spare them personal rebuke, he now proceeds from Macedonia into Achaia. Whether, as on the former journey, he passed through Athens again, we know not; I am inclined to think he did not, the cold and sceptic philosophy of that city could have little attraction for one of Paul's temperament, and his heart was yearning for his erring but repentant people at Corinth, and he accordingly hastened thither, and stayed three months. It had been his purpose on leaving Corinth to take ship from that city for Syria on his way to Jerusalem—but alas! even at Corinth, as at Damascus and as at Jerusalem, a plot was laid by the Jews against his life, and in order to frustrate their designs, he retraces his steps into Macedonia, and, separating his party into

* I cannot agree with the opinion that suggests a hasty and hurried visit to Corinth while at Ephesus, and returning to Ephesus again. I find no traces of it, and it seems altogether at variance with what Paul tells the Ephesian elders, that "for the space of three years he had not ceased to warn every one night and day." Had he gone to Corinth during that period, however hurried the visit and rapid the return, there must have been a long interval of cessation from warning.

two companies, fixes on Troas as the meeting point, where they should again assemble.

We now find Luke once more of the party—we gratefully recognize the little monosyllables "we" and "us," and soon find the presence of an eye-witness in the graphic sketch he gives us of the last evening spent at Troas—the upper chamber of the house where as usual they had met—the many lights that gleamed and glittered there—the overhanging balcony at the open window looking down on the pavement of the street, or the court-yard—the preacher earnest in his theme, so earnest that time passes by unheeded, the hours roll on, and still Paul is loth to quit, would still press a few more parting words, and they that listen are as apparently intent upon the theme as the preacher—and midnight draws on. But amid that assembly, a youth, overcome by the heat and exhaustion and the unwonted hour, sinks unwittingly to sleep; and losing his balance from that overhanging balcony, falls on the pavement below, and is taken up dead.

We can imagine the consternation and confusion in the assembly at this abrupt and melancholy termination of Paul's discourse; but as Jesus said of the daughter of Jairus, "the maid is not dead, only believe," so the apostle, in the power and spirit of Jesus, replies to the

weeping friends of Eutychus, "Give not way to such loud lamentation,* for his life is in him;" and as to Peter was given the power to recall the departed spirit of Dorcas, so at Paul's earnest prayer was restored the life of this young man.

It was the Lord's own gentle rebuke of far more censurable slumber, "The spirit truly is willing, but the flesh is weak," and though I would not for a moment palliate the sin and mockery of a sleepy slumbering spirit under the means of grace, yet where the Spirit of God has fixed no censure, I would not be the first to take up a stone to cast at this youth for his involuntary and unconscious act.

SECTION XCIII.

CHAP. XX. 13—32. *And we went before to ship, and sailed unto Assos, there intending to take in Paul: for so had he appointed, minding himself to go afoot. And when he met with us at Assos, we took him in, and came to Mitylene. And we sailed thence, and came the next day over against Chios; and the next day we arrived at Samos, and tarried at Trogyllium; and the next day we came to Miletus. For Paul had determined to sail by Ephesus, because he would not spend the time in Asia: for he hasted, if it were possible for him, to be at Jerusalem the day of Pentecost. And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus, and called the elders of the church. And when they were*

* μὴ θορυβεῖσθε.

come to him, he said unto them, Ye know, from the first day that I came into Asia, after what manner I have been with you at all seasons, serving the Lord with all humility of mind, and with many tears, and temptations, which befell me by the lying in wait of the Jews: and how I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have shewed you, and have taught you publickly, and from house to house, testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ. And now, behold, I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there: save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions abide me. But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God. And now, behold, I know that ye all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, shall see my face no more. Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God. Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears. And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified.

WE need not follow the Apostle's course, on

quitting Troas, through all the varied and lovely scenery of the Ægean Isles—those isles so familiar to our memories, so associated with the classic studies of earlier years, and still dearer to us as linked in imperishable union with the missionary labours of the Apostle of the Gentiles. It would appear that Paul stayed a few hours behind his companions at Troas, intending to join them on foot by the direct road to Assos, a distance of about thirty miles, while the ship's course round the cape would be double the distance. The reasons of this stay we know not; probably it was connected with the young man Eutychus, on whose heart the affectionate Apostle would desire to leave a lasting and saving impression of the mercy God had vouchsafed to him, and how that life restored by miraculous interposition should be especially consecrated to Him who had so lovingly given it back. I think we see, in Paul's after address to the Ephesian elders at Miletus, how his heart yearned after those to whom he had preached the Word of Life, and that, whenever opportunity was afforded, he never ceased to admonish and exhort in private also, and that with many tears. And he might well think a few hours well bestowed on this Trojan youth, and cheaply purchased at the expense of a long and fatiguing journey to his enfeebled and suffering frame, even after the previous night's exhausting labours. He counted everything gain that brought

his own soul nearer to Christ, and he would spare no cost, he would grudge no personal labour nor fatigue, that could win another's soul to the same precious and endeared Saviour.

At Assos, then, Paul joined the ship and his companions; and proceeding thence to Mitylene, the capital of Lesbos, and the next day to Chios, and from thence to Samos, and apparently stopping for the night at each place, probably having merchandise or passengers to land or to take in, they arrived at Miletus. There must have been many a mingled feeling in the Apostle's heart as he tarried, though but for a few hours, at Trogyllium, for the city that gleamed upon his sight from the opposite shore was Ephesus, amid its mountain ranges, and, conspicuous above all, at the harbour's mouth, stood the magnificent temple, once the wonder of a world, of that "great goddess Diana," whose name he could almost have fancied as still sounding in his ears. Yet Ephesus itself is no more, the very site of its temple is a subject of disputation; as Dr. Keith remarks, "The Epistle to the Ephesians is read throughout the world, but there is none in Ephesus to read it." But no such prophetic visions passed through the Apostle's mind, as he once more, in the morning twilight, caught sight of the scene of so many labours, and as his heart yearned once more to behold those for whom he had so travailed in spirit and in prayer.

It may be, and I think the words imply, that the thought may have entered Paul's mind that perhaps, now that he was so nigh, he might divert his course to them instead of proceeding onwards to Miletus; but it could not be—his great and urgent purpose was Jerusalem, and that too by a certain day, and he would not hazard the risk of failure by any deviation from his original plan. At Miletus, however, the vessel stopped for a time, and the thought immediately suggested itself to his affectionate heart that he would send for the elders of that Church to meet him there, that he might through them send his parting benediction to the Church at large; and so on reaching Miletus he instantly despatched a messenger to Ephesus, thirty miles distant, to bid them hasten to him.

"Blessed be God for every portion of His holy Word," said a pious writer two centuries ago, "but especially blessed be His Name for the eighth chapter to the Romans;" and so, I think, a Christian minister of the present day may with equal fervour exclaim, "Blessed be God for every portion of His Word, but especially blessed for this address of Paul to the Ephesian elders!" It is, in fact, the clergyman's vade-mecum, an epitome of the Christian minister's walk among the people committed to his charge. One is apt to think of the Apostle Paul only in his abundant labours, in his sufferings above measure, in his stripes and

imprisonments, in his perils by land and by sea, sustained by supplies of grace, and encouraged by immediate and personal revelations and visions and manifestations never now vouchsafed to any; and we are content to follow far and far behind in the wake of such a man. But here we see him almost as the parish priest: in this parting address Paul lifts up, as it were, the curtain, and suffers us to take one glance at his pastoral walk among his flock at Ephesus. We see him in his public ministration daily in the school of Tyrannus; we see him in his private intercourse with his people, going from house to house, and still testifying to the same holy truths which he had delivered from the pulpit, holding back nothing that was profitable, and ceasing not to warn every one night and day with tears. And I think, too, we see Paul in the retirement of his own chamber, communing with his own heart, and letting us take one glimpse of that inner life of the Christian's heart which is hid with Christ in God—how, in all humility of mind and with many tears, he sought to serve the Lord. It is no longer Paul the Apostle, but Paul the minister and pastor of his flock: just as he once touchingly described himself as "Paul the aged" with all the feelings and infirmities of age, so here, with all the anxieties and affections, and goings-out, and comings-in of a simple-minded, laborious, and faithful parish priest.

SECTION XCIV.

CHAP. XX. 33—38. *I have coveted no man's silver, or gold, or apparel. Yea, ye yourselves know, that these hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me. I have shewed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive. And when he had thus spoken, he kneeled down, and prayed with them all. And they all wept sore, and fell on Paul's neck, and kissed him, sorrowing most of all for the words which he spake, that they should see his face no more. And they accompanied him unto the ship.*

WE shall not enter fully into Paul's manner of life at Ephesus, nor estimate his character aright, if we do not avail ourselves of the glimpse he gives us in these verses of what we may call his more private and domestic life. We have seen him in his public ministrations both with Jew and Gentile; we have walked by his side as he went from house to house, testifying to all alike repentance towards God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ; and, as a father with his child, warning each individual of his flock with tears in his eyes. We have been permitted to look with no irreverent eye on that portion of his life on which, at the time, no eye but that of God rested, when alone with Him he was pouring out his soul before Him in behalf of those committed to his charge.

But still our view would be incomplete if we did not take into account his private and personal life as well. It was, you may perhaps think, no great amount of disinterestedness to say that he had coveted no man's silver, or gold, or apparel, any more than when Samuel bade the children of Israel to testify against him before the Lord, "whose ox have I taken, or whose ass have I taken, or whom have I defrauded, whom have I oppressed, or of whose hand have I received any bribe?" and yet the Lord often testified against the covetousness of those shepherds of Israel, who ate the fat, and clothed themselves with the wool, and yet fed not the flock.

But when Paul goes on to appeal to their own knowledge; and how strikingly do the words bring the whole scene before us!—Paul with uplifted hands, stretched out before them in confirmation of his words, "Yea! ye yourselves know that *these* hands—these very hands now held out before you—have ministered unto my necessities." It was probably on the shores of that Ægean sea, where the ship was at anchor off Miletus, that the Apostle was now addressing these Ephesian elders; and we may easily sketch in our mind's eye the whole picture as it must have presented itself to those actually present. The Apostle with outstretched hands in the foreground—by his side the companions of his travel, Luke and Sopater, and Aristarchus, and Secundus, and Gaius, and Tychicus, and Trophimus, and,

perhaps best beloved of all, as John was beloved of his Lord, his own son in the faith, Timotheus. In front were those from Ephesus, gazing on the features of their beloved Pastor with intensest love, blended with the deepest sorrow; and Paul's voice falling distinctly on the ear amid the swell and murmur of the waves.

And why should there be such sorrow in the meeting—why at the close of his address, as they fell upon his neck and kissed him, should they weep so sore? Because they had heard those sad and sorrowful words, "And now, behold, I know that ye shall see my face no more;" and we are told that amid all the bitterness of that parting hour, the saddest feeling was that they should hear that voice and see that face no more. We do not know whether they did see his face again, nor would it take away one jot from the truthfulness of his statement if he did visit Ephesus again. It was at the time he uttered the words the solemn conviction of his mind that he should never see them again; he lays no claim to prophetic inspiration on the matter, he in fact disclaims it—"I go unto Jerusalem, *not knowing* the things that shall befall me there." The only prophetic inspiration that was vouchsafed was that "the Holy Ghost witnessed that in every city bonds and afflictions abided him;" and in the deep sorrow of his heart, and the dark uncertainty that hung over the future, he might well believe

that he was bidding an eternal farewell in the flesh, till they should once more meet in the presence and in the home of their God and their Lord. It is not, as has been suggested, the language of despondence, for he distinctly declares, "None of these things move me," in comparison with the joyful termination of his course and the faithful conclusion of "the ministry he had received of the Lord Jesus." It was in reality the assured belief of the moment, and as such he uttered it.

I have said that this parting address of the Apostle to the Ephesian elders is especially precious to the ministers of Christ—to those, whoever they may be, that have oversight of any portion of the flock of Christ—to whom is committed the care of souls. It is a solemn thought that the commission is from the Holy Ghost—it may come by man's hands, it may be given by man's voice—it may be entrusted by man's consent and gift—but still the commission is from the Holy Ghost, the ruling and dispensing and ordaining and upholding power by which Christ's Church on earth is governed and appointed: and it is as overseers, overlookers, that He appoints His ministers, and that for the purpose of feeding the flock. "Feed my sheep," "feed my lambs," "feed the flock," "feed the Church of God," and as the constraining motive, because it is purchased with His own blood.

It was a fitting close of the day's proceedings that Paul knelt down and prayed with them all. How instinctively does the loving heart of God's children in every season, whether of joy or sorrow, betake itself to prayer, to communion and fellowship with God!—"in everything by prayer with supplication." We have the very words of many of Paul's prayers for his people, and especially for those at Ephesus: and one can well guess what would be the purport of that prayer so affectionately offered, and in so much sorrow, broken, perhaps, in part by the murmuring of the waves, but still more by the sobs and tears of those around him.

SECTION XCV.

CHAP. XXI. 1—9. *And it came to pass, that, after we were gotten from them, and had launched, we came with a straight course unto Coos, and the day following unto Rhodes, and from thence unto Patara: and finding a ship sailing over unto Phenicia, we went aboard, and set forth. Now, when we had discovered Cyprus, we left it on the left hand, and sailed into Syria, and landed at Tyre: for there the ship was to unlade her burden. And finding disciples, we tarried there seven days: who said to Paul through the Spirit, that he should not go up to Jerusalem. And when we had accomplished those days, we departed, and went our way; and they all brought us on our way, with wives and children, till we were out of the city: and we kneeled down on the shore, and prayed. And when*

we had taken our leave one of another, we took ship; and they returned home again. And when we had finished our course from Tyre, we came to Ptolemais, and saluted the brethren, and abode with them one day. And the next day we that were of Paul's company departed, and came unto Cæsarea; and we entered into the house of Philip the Evangelist, (which was one of the seven,) and abode with him. And the same man had four daughters, virgins, which did prophesy.

One might, perhaps, wish to know more of the Apostle's voyage from Miletus to Coos, and to Rhodes, and Tyre, and Ptolemais, till he reached Cæsarea. But it does not appear, that with the exception of Tyre, they stopped at any place more than a day, so earnest was Paul to accomplish his purpose of reaching Jerusalem by the feast of Pentecost. It would appear that the vessel in which they had sailed from Troas proceeded no further than Patara, at least in the direction of Paul's route, but happily another vessel was on the eve of sailing as they entered the bay, and so immediately going on board, they sailed for Tyre, the ship's destination.

This fortunate concurrence gave the Apostle ample time; and he availed himself of it by searching out the few Christians that were in the place, and joining himself to them in all affectionate brotherhood, so that, at the close of the week's stay, something of the same scene occurred on the shore of Tyre, as took place on that of Miletus. These affectionate disciples,

gifted it would seem with a spirit of prophecy, clearly foresaw, and were enabled in some measure to foretell, the persecutions and afflictions that awaited Paul at Jerusalem, and would fain have dissuaded him from venturing there. It had been the same with Paul's Master: Jesus, too, was going to Jerusalem, and well knew what would befall Him there, and His disciples, with fond but mistaken anxiety, say to Him, "Master! the Jews of late sought to stone thee, and goest thou thither again?" And so Paul had higher motives and holier impulses than to be diverted from what he knew to be the will of God by remonstrances or entreaties of friends.

I do not think that language could more simply or more touchingly depict a parting scene than the words here used, "They all brought us on our way, with wives and children, till we were out of the city, and we kneeled down on the shore and prayed; and when we had taken our leave one of another, *we* took ship and *they* returned home again." How often has a similar scene been repeated, not, perhaps, under the same circumstances of predicted sorrow and persecution, but how many an exile, many an emigrant, many a missionary—going to the very water's edge to take the last farewell, and kneeling down upon the shore in prayer—have commended one another to the grace and love of God! I remember that when that apostolic

missionary, the present Bishop of New Zealand, set forth from this country to that far off scene of his labours, he too was accompanied to the place of his embarcation by the friends and relatives who loved and honoured him. And though I do not suppose that there was one among them, who would, like Paul's Tyrian friends, have dissuaded him from the step he was taking; yet there must have been, and there was much of the same impulse that led them, too, to go down to the very shore, and there kneel down and pray: and so *he* took ship, and *they* returned home again.

At Ptolemais Paul stopped one day. Ptolemais is better known to us by its modern name of Acre, and one thinks for the moment of the hero of Acre, who eighteen hundred years afterwards has associated his own name with its memorable siege and defence; and yet Paul at Ptolemais, courteously saluting the brethren, and abiding there one day to talk of the things concerning the kingdom of God and to build one another up in their most holy faith, is far more interesting to the Christian student than all the annals of crusaders, or even the heroic defence of Sir Sidney Smith.

At Tyre Paul's voyage ended; and they proceeded by land on their next stage to Cesarea, about thirty miles distant. Here we again meet with one familiar to our memory, Philip the

Evangelist or preacher. The last time we read of him was on that memorable day when, in the desert road between Jerusalem and Gaza, he "preached Jesus" unto the Ethiopian eunuch, and baptized him in some stream or lake by the road side. As they came up out of the water, it is said that "the Spirit caught away Philip, so that the eunuch saw him no more, but he was found at Azotus, and passing through, he preached in all the cities, till he came to Cesarea." And there he had apparently continued ever since in his vocation and ministry as an evangelist or preacher, remembered indeed as "one of the seven," but more known and honoured by the distinguished name of the Evangelist.

I do not know whether Paul and Philip had ever met before—in all probability they had, and the very way in which their taking up their abode in the house of Philip is mentioned seems to imply as much. One likes to think of these "many days" of comparative quiet and repose, after all his wanderings by land and by sea, which the Apostle spent beneath the roof of this Christian preacher and his pious family; that his spirit would be strengthened and refreshed by the companionship of that godly household, and that in this intercourse with Philip and his daughters he would have abundant reason to thank God, and take courage.

SECTION XCVI.

CHAP. XXI. 10—14. *And as we tarried there many days, there came down from Judæa a certain prophet, named Agabus. And when he was come unto us, he took Paul's girdle, and bound his own hands and feet, and said, Thus saith the Holy Ghost, So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man that owneth this girdle, and shall deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles. And when we heard these things, both we, and they of that place, besought him not to go up to Jerusalem. Then Paul answered, What mean ye to weep and to break mine heart? for I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus. And when he would not be persuaded, we ceased, saying, The will of the Lord be done.*

WHEN Jesus, before his own crucifixion, was preparing the minds of his disciples for the persecution and troubles which would befall them after his departure, he said, "I have told you before it come to pass, that when it is come to pass, ye might believe." The followers of a crucified Redeemer are enlisted under no false colours, and won by no false promises and hopes. "In the world ye shall have tribulation," "The world hateth you," "They have persecuted me, they will also persecute you." And how sadly was all this realized to the Apostle Paul at every step of his way in this his present journey, at every place he tarried! At any moment he might have turned

round to his companions and have said almost in the very words of Jesus, "Behold, we go up to Jerusalem, and I shall be delivered unto the chief priests and the scribes, and they shall deliver me to the Gentiles, and shall mock and shall scourge and shall spit upon me." And as he drew nearer to that doomed and guilty city, which killed the prophets, and stoned them that were sent unto her, with what clearer vision, with what more distinct minuteness was the whole scene laid before him. At Miletus he had the dark outline of imprisonment and bondage looming before him; at Tyre too, there were disciples who, evidently under the influence of the Holy Spirit, had a clear insight into what was to befall the Apostle at Jerusalem, and who in the affectionate zeal of their loving hearts would have dissuaded him from going thither. And now again at Cesarea, more significantly, more pointedly is the same declaration of suffering and of bondage made, and that, too, by a prophet of the Most High, and in the name of the Holy Ghost, "Thus saith the Holy Ghost."

It must have been a touching scene that day, when, probably at the close of some prayer-meeting in Philip's house, Agabus, so well known as a prophet, and who, it would almost seem, had come specially from Judæa to meet the Apostle, stood up in the presence of them all, and with significant and well-understood emblematic action

so familiar to the prophets of the Hebrew race, unloosed the girdle that was round the Apostle's loins, and, binding his own hands and feet, declared, in the name of the Holy Ghost, that in the same manner should the owner of the girdle be bound by the Jews at Jerusalem, and delivered over to the Gentiles. The tone of voice, the tenour of the words, the significance of the action, all combined to make a deep and solemn impression on the assembly, comprising not only Paul's immediate companions, but Philip's household, and other disciples of Cesarea. For a moment tears were their only answer; but as soon as they could recall their thoughts, they one and all, with simultaneous entreaty, besought their beloved teacher that he would not go up to Jerusalem—that he would look upon the words of Agabus as a heaven-sent warning that he should desist from his purpose.

I almost wonder that Paul did not yield; he, himself, well knew and has left on record his conviction that no affliction for the present seemeth joyous, but grievous; he had no ambition to court martyrdom for martyrdom's sake; he knew his Master's rule, "If they persecute you in one city flee to another," and he could not but be conscious that his life, and his liberty also, were of deep importance to the Church of Christ. Then there were the instincts of human nature shrinking from pain and suffering, the earnest and

reiterated importunity of friends whom he dearly loved, the solemn warning of a prophet of God assuring him what would be the result of his abiding by his resolution; and besides all this, there might be a suggestion darted into his own mind that perhaps he was rash, wrong, fool-hardy in thus withstanding what almost seemed a providential intimation of the Lord's will.

I say, humanly speaking, I wonder at Paul's not yielding; and what had he to set against it all —what was the far heavier consideration which he placed in the opposite balance, and which at once weighed down the tears and importunities of friends, and the suggestions of his own carnal heart, and the shrinkings of his own shattered and enfeebled frame? It was the Word of God to his own soul. I do not say that Agabus was like the old prophet of Bethel, who lied unto the man of God; but, like that man of God, Paul, too, had the distinct word of God to himself—the Holy Ghost had witnessed to him that in every city bonds and afflictions abided him. And what did the Holy Ghost testify by the mouth of Agabus? The very same truth—that in Jerusalem as in Philippi, in Rome as in Jerusalem, he was to be ready, not to be bound only, but to die for the Name of the Lord Jesus.

It was no triumph of human courage—no result of mere physical daring and endurance—no calculation of chances—no buoyancy from the cheering

encouragement of friends, or the applause of by-standers—there was not an atom of human heroism in the matter. Many a saying of a dying patriot, many a declaration of a martyred saint in the dungeon, on the scaffold, or at the stake has been recorded, and has come down to our times, but I think not one can compete, not one be put into the scale with the noble simplicity, and the Christian tone and character of the Apostle's answer to the weeping friends that stood around and besought him not to go up to Jerusalem; and I would add, too, the touching resignation and surrender of their own feelings with which they gave up the contest, saying, "The will of the Lord be done!"

SECTION XCVII.

CHAP. XXI. 15—25. *And after those days we took up our carriages, and went up to Jerusalem. There went with us also certain of the disciples of Cesarea, and brought with them one Mnason of Cyprus, an old disciple, with whom we should lodge. And when we were come to Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly. And the day following Paul went in with us unto James; and all the elders were present. And when he had saluted them, he declared particularly what things God had wrought among the Gentiles by his ministry. And when they heard it, they glorified the Lord, and said unto him, Thou seest, brother, how many thousands of Jews there are which believe; and they are all zealous of the law: and they are informed of*

thee, that thou teachest all the Jews which are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, saying that they ought not to circumcise their children, neither to walk after the customs. What is it therefore? the multitude must needs come together: for they will hear that thou art come. Do therefore this that we say to thee: We have four men which have a vow on them; them take, and purify thyself with them, and be at charges with them, that they may shave their heads: and all may know that those things, whereof they were informed concerning thee, are nothing; but that thou thyself also walkest orderly, and keepest the law. As touching the Gentiles which believe, we have written and concluded that they observe no such thing, save only that they keep themselves from things offered to idols, and from blood, and from strangled, and from fornication.

FOUR years at least had elapsed since Paul's last visit to Jerusalem—four years of abundant harvest to the Church of Christ, in the scenes of the Apostle's labours, but four years of barrenness to the doomed and guilty city, which he had now entered for the last time. Its day of grace had passed, when Jesus pronounced that melancholy doom over it, that not one stone should be left upon another; but it had not yet filled up the measure of its iniquities even when the blood of Jesus was poured out upon the cross; nor had it yet exhausted the long-suffering and forbearance of God. Still were messengers and prophets, and teachers and apostles, to be sent unto it, and some of them they should beat, and some they should stone, and some kill. And we have seen with what prophetic forebodings of evil Paul, too, had

now entered the city, and how none of these things moved him, and how he counted not his life dear unto himself, and could rejoice in the thought that he was himself to be persecuted for the name of Christ.

Paul's company had increased as he went along, and several from Cesarea accompanied him to Jerusalem in order to testify their respect for the Apostle, as well as to be present at the Feast, and it must have been grateful to Paul's feelings, when he reached the city, to find that through their kindness a lodging had been secured for himself and party in the house of an old disciple, whom he himself had probably well known, when he had visited Cyprus with Barnabas, and who, it may be, had been converted to the faith by their ministry.

No doubt Paul's visit to Jerusalem must have given rise to many conflicting feelings even among the members of the Christian Church. There were many that would receive him gladly; James, and the brethren that thought and acted with him, would again cordially extend to him the right hand of fellowship: while there were far more who would look on him as an innovator, and as one who had from first to last unflinchingly set himself to oppose in every way the spirit of Judaizing encroachment on the liberty of Gentile converts. It had met him in various places,—it had thwarted many a zealous labour,

and disappointed many a hope: at Antioch, in Galatia, and at Corinth he had come into painful collision with those who had so strenuously sought to draw away the Gentiles from that liberty wherewith Christ had made them free, and impose upon them the heavy bondage of the law of Moses, with all its ritual of ceremonial observances, which had now fulfilled its appointed purpose, and was to be done away, or, in his own words to the Hebrews, "was waxing old, and ready to vanish." It was the great conflict of the Apostle's life, and as he had a bodily thorn in the flesh in a sickly and enfeebled frame, and continual remindings of that frail and perishing tabernacle, which was to be taken down, so had he a far more piercing and bitter thorn in the spirit in those adversaries who were ever seeking to undermine the simplicity and singleness of the faith in Christ.

He well knew that he was now about to come into collision with the bitterest gainsayers of the truth, at their very head-quarters—men who for their own ends had misrepresented the doctrines he taught, and were ready to avail themselves of the slightest opening to avenge on Paul what they considered his treacherous hostility to and apostasy from the law of Moses. He knew, too, that there would be a vast "multitude" of persons assembled at Jerusalem at the feast, who, as soon as they should hear of his arrival, would

gather together, and endeavour to renew with more success at Jerusalem that uproar from which he had with such difficulty escaped at Ephesus. It behoved, him, therefore, to walk with all circumspection, that he gave no occasion to the adversary to speak reproachfully; and if at Antioch Peter, through unworthy fear of them of the circumcision, laid himself open to well-deserved rebuke, and Barnabas also, Paul's fellow labourer and associate, was carried away with their dissimulation, it was especially incumbent on the Apostle of the Gentiles not only himself to be "grounded and settled in the faith, and not moved away from the hope of the Gospel, whereof he was made a minister," but to show to others that they were no longer to be "subject to ordinances (which were all to perish in the using) after the commandments and doctrines of men." Every eye would be upon him, and if ever any man had need of the grace of God to "walk in wisdom towards them that are without," Paul had need of it in Jerusalem at this time. And I cannot but think that he did not walk in wisdom in the way he took, though urged by friendly counsel, and sanctioned by Apostolic approval. Paul well knew the cross that was to meet him at Jerusalem—what was to befall him there had been distinctly and symbolically foreshown, and yet almost his first act was a concession to Jewish prejudices in order to escape it.

It may be said it was a matter indifferent in itself, and that Paul's rule of practice laid down for his Corinthian people advocates the very course he took. Be it so; but Paul at Jerusalem was a marked man, and what would have been no compromise of principle in another was, in his own case at least, an unthinking surrender of his position, a momentary abandonment of the truth, and, it may be, a timid avoidance of the cross. He knew that bonds and imprisonment awaited him in Jerusalem; and it certainly is striking that the very act by which he sought to conciliate his opponents was the channel through which the predicted bonds and imprisonment came upon him.

SECTION XCVIII.

CHAP. XXI. 26—32. *Then Paul took the men, and the next day purifying himself with them entered into the temple, to signify the accomplishment of the days of purification, until that an offering should be offered for every one of them. And when the seven days were almost ended, the Jews which were of Asia, when they saw him in the temple, stirred up all the people, and laid hands on him, crying out, Men of Israel, help: This is the man that teacheth all men every where against the people, and the law, and this place: and further, brought Greeks also into the temple, and hath polluted this holy place. (For they had seen before with him in the city Trophimus an Ephesian, whom they supposed that Paul had brought*

into the temple. And all the city was moved, and the people ran together; and they took Paul and drew him out of the temple: and forthwith the doors were shut. And as they went about to kill him, tidings came unto the chief captain of the band, that all Jerusalem was in an uproar; who immediately took soldiers and centurions, and ran down unto them: and when they saw the chief captain and the soldiers, they left beating of Paul.

THE circumstances to which the preceding section alludes are these. It was not uncommon, and was indeed looked upon as an act of pious devotion for an Israelite to bind himself by a Nazaritic vow, that is, to separate himself for a season from the usual practices and habits of life, in order that he might devote himself more fully unto the Lord. This season was longer or shorter at the will of the devotee, and its conclusion was marked by certain ceremonies and offerings, defined and regulated by the law of Moses. These offerings were expensive, and it often happened beyond the means of the poorer Israelite, but there were always richer brethren at hand, who were ready to pay these charges and join with them in the customary rites of purification, as a pleasing act of piety towards God, and charity towards their brethren.

Such was the case here with these four men, and the charges which the Apostle was to undertake at his own cost were eight lambs, and four rams, besides unleavened bread, and cakes of flour and oil, with meat offerings and drink

offerings, and to attend with them and present himself to the priest, as ready on behalf of the Nazarites to make the accustomed offerings. To an Israelite the vow of a Nazarite was peculiarly solemn, and associated with some of the dearest recollections of their past history. "I raised up," said the Lord by his prophet Amos—"I raised up your sons for prophets, and of your young men for Nazarites." There were Nazarites set apart unto the Lord even from their birth, such as Samson and Samuel, and still more recently John the Baptist; and the vow of a Nazarite, however limited the period, was looked upon as the offering of a holy and grateful spirit for deliverance granted in some time of trouble, or grace vouchsafed in some hour of especial need.

Under ordinary circumstances, therefore, Paul's act would have been only a graceful and judicious concession to the prejudices of his own countrymen, involving no compromise of principle, as it certainly did no deviation from the customs and ordinances of his people. But in the position in which he was placed, with every eye watching most jealously his conduct—the Jew looking for somewhat on which to found an accusation, and the Gentile still more anxiously looking to his conduct as an example and pattern to themselves, I cannot but think that the conclusion to which we must come is, that though it was undoubtedly lawful it was assuredly not expedient; and that

in this attempt to "please all men in all things" he "gave offence both to Jew and Gentile, and to the Church of God."

There is nothing that requires so much grace or such need of prayer, such looking up unto God for guidance at every step, as in our concessions to the prejudices and opinions of the world for the sake of peace. Our instinct and nature is so apt to lead us to the very confine, to the boundary line of right and wrong, and beyond it—we are so prone to mistake our own love of ease for a conciliatory spirit, and to think that by ourselves going one mile with the world in its way, we shall induce it to turn back and go twain in ours—and yet, at the same time, we are so ready to affix an undue importance to things indifferent as if they were essential, and to expect all alike to see with our eyes, and judge with our judgment, and measure by our rule, and weigh by our scale, that I do think to walk in wisdom towards them that are without, laying no stumbling-block in a brother's way, and wounding the weak consciences of none, and giving no offence, neither to Jew nor Gentile, nor the Church of God, is the most difficult of all graces, and needs an especial outlay of watchfulness and prayer.

But to return to the Apostle. With him, indeed, it was in this matter as with the Psalmist, "I am for peace, but they are for war;" and any charge, any pretext, however vague and unsub-

stantial, serves malignity for a handle. There were, no doubt, Ephesian Jews at Jerusalem at this feast, still rankling with spite against Paul for their own rough treatment on that day of uproar at Ephesus, and with hostility against the doctrines he preached; and to whom Paul and his companions were well known. It would seem they had recognised him and Trophimus, an Ephesian and Gentile, in the streets of Jerusalem, and finding Paul with the Nazarites in those sacred precincts of the Temple, to which no Gentile was permitted access, they immediately raised against him the well-known and effective cry of blasphemy and sacrilege. Such a cry in Jerusalem, in the very temple, amid such a concourse, and at such a season, produced its intended mischief, and instantly "all Jerusalem was in an uproar." Dragging their victim out of the Temple, lest it should be polluted by the shedding of blood, and the Levites hastily closing the temple-gates against them, and so leaving Paul to the mercy of this infuriated mob, he would have speedily fallen a victim to their rage, had not the commandant of the troops, always quartered close at hand in the Tower of Antonio for the repression of such tumults, hastened down with his soldiers and rescued Paul from their violence.

Oh, Jerusalem, Jerusalem! thou that killest the prophets and stonest them that are sent unto thee! Oh, that thou hadst known in that thy day the

things that belonged unto thy peace, but thou wouldest not, and now they are hid from thine eyes!

SECTION XCIX.

CHAP. XXI. 33—40. *Then the chief captain came near, and took him, and commanded him to be bound with two chains; and demanded who he was, and what he had done. And some cried one thing, some another, among the multitude: and when he could not know the certainty for the tumult, he commanded him to be carried into the castle. And when he came upon the stairs, so it was, that he was borne of the soldiers for the violence of the people. For the multitude of the people followed after, crying, Away with him. And as Paul was to be led into the castle, he said unto the chief captain, May I speak unto thee? Who said, Canst thou speak Greek? Art not thou that Egyptian, which before these days madest an uproar, and leddest out into the wilderness four thousand men that were murderers? But Paul said, I am a man which am a Jew of Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, a citizen of no mean city: and, I beseech thee, suffer me to speak unto the people. And when he had given him licence, Paul stood on the stairs, and beckoned with the hand unto the people. And when there was made a great silence, he spake unto them in the Hebrew tongue, saying,*

IT is a very graphic picture which the historian gives of the ungovernable rage and violence of this Jewish mob. He must have seen it, one cannot but think, with his own eyes; he, too, may have been in the Temple when Paul was

dragged forth from it, and have been equally hurried by their mad fury down that flight of steps which led to the outer court, and the gates had been equally closed and barred against him as against Paul and the rest, and the whole scene may have passed under his very eye.

It is true, that at the sight of the soldiers and their officers the people left off beating their victim—not, assuredly, from any commiseration or shame, nor even from any fear of consequences to themselves. Fury never stops to weigh such chances, it rushes blindfold on, like a wild beast in its rage, trampling down and crushing everything in its course; but they had no doubt that the chief Captain himself would, as soon as he knew the charge, yield up his prisoner to their hands. So scrupulous were their Roman masters of violating the sanctity of their holy temple, that at the confines, where a Gentile might tread with impunity and not advance one step beyond, notices were affixed to the pillars, both in Latin and Greek, warning every one that was not a Jew from setting foot within; and so strict was the regulation that even a Roman might be put to death who violated it.* They could not doubt, therefore, that Lysias would at once and without scruple hand over the prisoner to their own law: and his first act in bidding Paul be bound to two soldiers by each wrist, seemed to intimate a deter-

* Josephus, "Bell. Judaic.," V. 5, 2—VI. 2, 4.

mination that no escape nor rescue should be attempted. He then inquires into the charge, but amid the noise, and the confusion, and the mingled voices of the excited multitude, one crying one thing, and one another, he makes out no distinct charge, and is naturally led to the conclusion that as none but a most notorious malefactor and offender could have excited so fierce an outcry, so Paul must be an Egyptian insurgent leader, who, proclaiming himself appointed of God to restore the kingdom of Israel, had a short time before advanced as far as Mount Olivet, at the head of a large body of deluded followers, but had been defeated by Felix; and though he had, for the time, escaped, yet great efforts were making for his apprehension; and Lysias naturally concluded that nothing but the detection and discovery of this impostor could have stirred up such an uproar.

This, however, would be a political offence, to be judged by Roman law, and the chief captain accordingly orders the prisoner to be carried into the castle for further examination. And then it was that the scene here described took place—that these infuriated Jews, seeing their victim escaping from their grasp, rushed up the stairs that led to the Tower of Antonio that they might drag Paul back out of the hands of the soldiers; and so great was the pressure and the violence, that in order to save their prisoner, the soldiers lifted

him up, and carried him up the stairs in their own arms, while the crowd, like a baffled blood-hound disappointed of its prey, yelled and roared with the most furious cries of "Away with him, away with him; kill him, kill him."

In the midst of this uproar, and anxious for his prisoner's safe keeping, Lysias had placed himself by the side of Paul, who, calm and unruffled amid the storm, as if another's life and not his own was in danger, simply asked in Greek, "May I speak a word to you?" The chief captain startled at the sound of Greek from an Egyptian insurgent and leader of banditti, and perhaps still more astonished at the quiet, placid demeanour of one in such imminent danger, replied in evident surprise, "What! understandest thou Greek? I had thought you were that Egyptian ringleader of assassins."

At this moment there was evidently a feeling of compassion arising in the heart of Lysias towards his prisoner, and he seems to have thought that the Jews, as well as himself, had been greatly mistaken as to the person and character of Paul, and that in consenting to his request to address the people, they would be disabused of their mistake, and the uproar would cease. It is probable that he also ordered Paul's release from the chains with which he had been bound, for we find him here standing at the top of the flight of stairs, while the crowd were kept

at bay below, in his usual attitude, and with hand outstretched to bespeak attention, addressed them in the Hebrew or Syriac dialect, so dear to Jewish ears, and which in the present instance, like oil upon the stormy waves, at once hushed them into silence.

It must have been a striking scene; the heaving crowd below, swaying to and fro, with upturned faces, in which fury and bitterness were still the characteristic features; above, at the stair-head, with calm and quiet look, with hands outstretched, almost as if to bless, stood the Apostle in attitude to speak, while on each side the Roman soldiery and their officers, in mute and silent amazement at the contrast and wondering at the cause, gazing from one to the other, and though they understood not Paul's words, yet seeing their effect instilling the madness of the people.

SECTION C.

CHAP. XXII. 1—23. *Men, brethren, and fathers, hear ye my defence which I make now unto you. (And when they heard that he spake in the Hebrew tongue to them, they kept the more silence: and he saith,) I am verily a man which am a Jew, born in Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, yet brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, and taught according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers, and was zealous toward God as ye are all this*

day. And I persecuted this way unto the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women. As also the high priest doth bear me witness, and all the estate of the elders: from whom also I received letters unto the brethren, and went to Damascus, to bring them which were there bound unto Jerusalem, for to be punished. And it came to pass, that, as I made my journey, and was come nigh unto Damascus about noon, suddenly there shone from heaven a great light round about me. And I fell unto the ground, and heard a voice saying unto me, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? And I answered, Who art thou, Lord? And he said unto me, I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom thou persecutest. And they that were with me saw indeed the light, and were afraid; but they heard not the voice of him that spake to me. And I said, What shall I do, Lord? And the Lord said unto me, Arise, and go into Damascus, and there it shall be told thee of all things which are appointed for thee to do. And when I could not see for the glory of that light, being led by the hand of them that were with me, I came into Damascus. And one Ananias, a devout man according to the law, having a good report of all the Jews which dwelt there, came unto me, and stood and said unto me, Brother Saul, receive thy sight. And the same hour I looked up upon him. And he said, The God of our fathers hath chosen thee, that thou shouldest know his will, and see that Just One, and shouldest hear the voice of his mouth. For thou shalt be his witness unto all men of what thou hast seen and heard. And now, why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord. And it came to pass, that, when I was come again to Jerusalem, even while I prayed in the temple, I was in a trance; and saw him saying unto me, Make haste, and get thee quickly out of Jerusalem: for they will not receive thy testimony concerning me. And I said, Lord, they know that I imprisoned and beat in every synagogue them that believed

on thee: and when the blood of thy martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by, and consenting unto his death, and kept the raiment of them that slew him. And he said unto me, Depart; for I will send thee far hence unto the Gentiles. And they gave him audience unto this word, and then lifted up their voices, and said, Away with such a fellow from the earth; for it is not fit that he should live. And as they cried out, and cast off their clothes, and threw dust into the air,

THIS defence of Paul's from the stair's-head of the Tower of Antonio carries us back again to those earlier days, when another than Paul was pleading for his life as well as the defence of the Gospel before an equally infuriated audience, and when Paul himself stood by, and, as he listened, gnashed on him with his teeth. Had any one on that day shown to him in vision or predicted such a scene as the present one—in the same city—within a stone's throw, nay, almost within hearing of the same chamber or hall in which he himself had stood and gave his vote against the martyr—had anyone suggested that, ere many years had passed away, the very same charge, which he was so instrumental in bringing against Stephen, would be brought against himself, that he too spake against Moses and the law and "the holy place," and that in his ears would ring that fierce and furious cry, "Away with him, away with him"—we can well imagine with what scornful incredulity that

"young man Saul" would have received it all as an idle tale.

But had that same prophet gone on to say that Paul's thoughts and feelings and views would be as much altered as his earthly position,—that all for which he was then contending would be as dross and dung in comparison with the name of Christ; that instead of exulting in his mad career as a persecutor of the Christian faith, he would have cast in his lot with that despised people, and been content, nay rejoiced, to be called "the ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes," and would glory in nothing save in the cross of Christ,—I think Saul would have smiled, as we may suppose that lord to have smiled, on whose hand the King of Israel leaned, when he said, "If the Lord would make windows in heaven, then might this thing be."

I do not suppose there is anyone who can look back on the changes which twenty years have wrought for good or for evil without astonishment and almost, perhaps, incredulity. "I am as a wonder unto many," said the Psalmist, when he thought of the things God had wrought; but to none is a man so great a wonder as to himself, when he calmly takes the map of his past actual life into his hands, and compares it with what he sketched out for himself in the day-dreams of his youth. In the one all bright and brilliant as a summer-day: no breakers ahead, no sunken

rocks, no gathering storms, no stranded vessels, no shipwrecked hopes, no tearful eyes, no broken hearts, no partings, no closed and covered graves. In the other, thwarted prospects, disappointed hopes, and a sickened heart, and yet, withal, other prospects, other hopes, other friends and companions of life than those with whom we set out—convictions of sin, darkening yet brightening—bemoanings of the bruised and contrite heart, yet issuing in peace—new thoughts, new feelings, new energies, all that we once thought strange and repulsive, now welcomed and cherished as an angel and messenger of peace, and the affections that once centered on earth now finding their true resting-place and home where Stephen looked and saw Jesus at the right hand of God. The difference between the young man Saul in the Hall of Gazith, gnashing with *his* teeth on Stephen, and Paul on the staircase of the Tower of Antonio, with the Jews below gnashing with *their* teeth on him, may be summed up in the expressive words of one who believed in Jesus,—"I was blind, but now I see."

The whole of Paul's address on this occasion is managed with consummate tenderness and judgment. The very opening seems to show with what a calm and unquailing eye he must have glanced over that heaving crowd below him, tossing to and fro; and seeing among them some high in authority and office, and it may be even

advanced in years, he addresses them, not merely in the customary form of "Men and brethren," but he adds the more respectful salutation of "Fathers" also—"Men, brethren, and fathers." They are the very same words, too, with which Stephen had begun his address to the assembly before which he was arraigned; and we know that the thought of that martyred one, and the remembrance of that day of sin was in the Apostle's mind while he was recounting the wonderful change which had been wrought in him since that day, as some among that crowd no doubt remembered when the blood of the martyr Stephen was shed, and when Paul himself was standing by and consenting unto his death. And in what different language does he now speak of that deed of sin, in what a new light does he now view it! how unshrinkingly does he affix the right name to those who shared in the guilt—"them that *slew* Him." Among those "fathers" whom he was addressing, there might be some who had been present on that day, and who, like Paul, had consented unto, justified, and approved the act; and whose indignation would be naturally roused by such a charge as that of murder.

Up to this point they appear to have listened with patience, if not with interest; the details of his miraculous conversion, the wondrous change wrought, were all full of the deepest interest. They might have heard a vague account of the

transaction before, but now to listen to the narrative from the Apostle's own lips must, for the moment at least, have hushed every voice into silence, and no doubt the chief captain was congratulating himself on such a termination of the day's disturbance, when in an instant the storm broke forth again with redoubled violence and fury—again the cries rung forth from every voice, "Away with such a fellow from the earth; it is not fit that he should live;" and this, too, accompanied with all the significant and expressive evidence of Jewish hatred and malice, throwing off their upper garments, as if making ready to stone their victim, and casting dust into the air in token of their abhorrence and scorn.

SECTION CI.

CHAP. XXII. 24—30. *The chief captain commanded him to be brought into the castle, and bade that he should be examined by scourging: that he might know wherefore they cried so against him. And as they bound him with thongs, Paul said unto the centurion that stood by, Is it lawful for you to scourge a man that is a Roman, and uncondemned? When the centurion heard that, he went and told the chief captain, saying, Take heed what thou doest: for this man is a Roman. Then the chief captain came, and said unto him, Tell me, art thou a Roman? He said, Yea. And the chief captain answered, With a great sum obtained I this freedom. And Paul said, But I was*

free born. Then straightway they departed from him which should have examined him: and the chief captain also was afraid, after he knew that he was a Roman, and because he had bound him. On the morrow, because he would have known the certainty wherefore he was accused of the Jews, he loosed him from his bands, and commanded the chief priests and all their council to appear, and brought Paul down, and set him before them.

We must remember that the whole of Paul's address on this occasion was unintelligible to the Roman officer who listened to it. He could only judge of its purport by its effects, and when he heard this sudden outcry, and these violent gestures of hatred and malice so unexpectedly following the preceding calm, he was still more astonished and perplexed. Had he understood what Paul had said, and which had so excited the maddened passions of the people, it is possible he would have been still more perplexed, and might have said, in the words of one afterwards, "Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth!"

As it was, his original suspicions against his prisoner returned with all their force, and, whoever he might turn out to be, there could be no doubt in his mind that he was at least a notorious and dangerous offender against the State. It was the custom of ancient judicature, and, indeed, one must add, of modern also, to cut the Gordian knot of its difficulties and perplexities by ordering a prisoner, against whom no certain charge was known, to be examined by torture, that out of

his own mouth they might convict him. One only wonders that so strange a relic of barbarism, so mighty an engine of injustice and wrong, should have lingered so long in our own code; and I think that in that day when the secrets of all hearts shall be disclosed, and every prison-house, and every dungeon of the Inquisition, shall reveal its horrors, the rack, and the screw, and the scourge, and all the implements of torture which fiends could devise, will be found to have produced the greatest amount of falsehood of all the engines which the father of lies has let loose upon the world.

Lysias acted but in conformity with the spirit and customs of the times, and the injunctions of his own legislature, in ordering Paul to be examined by scourging, in order to extract a confession from him. He appears to have been a man of a kindly as well as a just spirit, and to have acted towards his prisoner with moderation and forbearance. In the enumeration of his many and varied sufferings, which the Apostle reckons up in detail to the Corinthians, he says, "thrice was I beaten with rods," that is, by Gentile executioners in distinction to the Jewish mode by scourging. We know that at Philippi was once of this thrice; and here, too, how nearly was the sentence executed—how almost might this have been reckoned a second time! Actually stripped, actually bound, actually tied to the post

or stake, and the executioner with uplifted lash waiting for the signal! Yet not a stroke was permitted to fall; "bonds and imprisonment" indeed awaited him in Jerusalem, but no scourging —not one stroke from lash or thong. And so, as it was with Israel for their sin in the wilderness, "while the meat was yet in their mouths" the wrath of God came upon them, so here, while the victim stood bound at the stake, while the lash was uplifted and ready to fall, it was at once arrested, and not a blow fell.

At Philippi Paul's plea of Roman citizenship, if put forward, as we have supposed it was, was either unheard or disbelieved; at any rate, it availed nothing to arrest the sentence: here, in the presence of Roman soldiers and a Roman officer of rank, and when a judicial inquiry and examination was in progress, such a plea demanded and received instant attention. The very binding of an uncondemned citizen of Rome was illegal; had a single stroke fallen, it would have been a deep crime.* Well, therefore, might the centurion hasten back to his superior officer, and say, "Take heed what thou doest, for this man is a Roman"!

One can imagine the renewed and increased perplexity of Lysias at this intelligence. Who could this prisoner be, and what his offence? He

* Facinus est vincire civem Romanum, scelus verberare.
—*Cicero.*

was evidently not the Egyptian insurgent he had supposed, and yet there must be some hidden mystery of crime which he could not unravel, and which had so exasperated the Jews. Was this plea of Roman citizenship an assumed one for the occasion? And yet that could hardly be, for an imposition of that kind was visited with the heaviest punishment. At any rate, it had been made, and must be investigated. It is not necessary for us to enter into the question how St. Paul attained his freedom; he tells us that it was an inherited freedom by right of birth, and therefore more honourable than the purchased privilege of the Chief Captain. One wonders that a distinction that could be purchased with money should be considered any distinction at all, and still more that Rome herself had set her dignities to sale; though, having begun to do so, one wonders not that ere long her very empire and throne were at length set up to sale.

It is probable that Paul explained to the Chief Captain the nature of the charge against him; and Lysias, like Gallio, finding it to be "a question of words and names, and of their law," more wisely determined to have the matter examined into and decided by the great Jewish Council or Sanhedrim, and so, if possible, to arrive at the truth. He accordingly appointed the next day for the inquiry; and thus terminated this day's disturbance with the Lord's signal in-

terposition, in the very midst of peril, to rescue his servant from harm or injury.

SECTION CII.

CHAP. XXIII. 1—3. *And Paul earnestly beholding the council, said, Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day. And the high priest Ananias commanded them that stood by him to smite him on the mouth. Then said Paul unto him, God shall smite thee, thou whited wall: for sittest thou to judge me after the law, and commandest me to be smitten contrary to the law?*

IF the exasperated multitude of the preceding day, with their fierce gestures and outcries, must have reminded Paul of that sad and sinful day in which he took such an active part when the blood of the Lord's martyr Stephen was shed, the scene which presented itself on the morning of the day which we have now reached must have recalled still more painfully to his mind the feelings of rage and bitterness with which he had listened to that martyr's defence before the same Council, and probably on the very same spot, or closely adjoining to it. There were, no doubt, many among them whose features would be familiar to him, and with whom he may have gone to the house of God as friends, and taken sweet counsel together

in the early and comparatively innocent days of their youth; and now a gulf, wide as eternity itself, lay between them. Earthly friendship and intimacy, human love and companionship and intercourse had long ceased, and those countenances on which he had once looked with affectionate regard, and those voices which had only uttered accents of kindness and of interest, were now darkened with undissembled hatred, and muttering execration and scorn.

I know not whether Gamaliel was present; he might have been, for he was still living; but I cannot think he was. He could have been no indifferent observer of the times, and must have watched with anxious and jealous eye the progress of that faith, of which in its far earlier days he had said, "If this work be of men, it will come to nought, but if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it;" and, so far from coming to nought, it had gone on conquering and to conquer; it had spread with inconceivable rapidity through "all Asia;" it had penetrated into Europe, it had reached Imperial Rome,—and, what must have touched Gamaliel most of all, it had found its way even into his own school, laid prostrate his own teaching, and robbed him of his fairest and dearest scholars.

It is a question deeply interesting, why, with all this evidence that the faith which Paul preached was of God—why did not Gamaliel

become a Christian? We cannot answer it; there is a day when the secrets of all hearts, and Gamaliel's heart among them, shall be disclosed, and till then we must leave it. He had not learned to call all things but dross and dung in comparison with Christ; and his earthly distinction as Rabban, and the high odour of sanctity in which he lived among his brethren, were not favourable adjuncts to that humility of spirit which could be content to sit lowest at the feet of Christ, and to esteem others better than himself.

The earlier actors in the scene, those cruel murderers of the Lord Jesus, and bitter adversaries of the Christian faith, Annas and Caiaphas, had now passed away; and we find another high priest in their place. Earthly priesthoods and dignities stay not the hand of death, and though Caiaphas could say that Jesus should die for the people, yet, alas! he at least had no interest in that blood-shedding which he was so instrumental in causing to be poured out upon the cross at Calvary. And yet the Ananias mentioned here was in reality no high priest—he had been, but had been deposed for his crimes—his successor had been assassinated, and no other had been appointed in his place; and Ananias, a bold and unscrupulous man, and of great wealth and influence, had thrust himself into the vacant seat and assumed its functions. And this will

account, in some measure, for the scene which we find recorded in this chapter.

It has been said that there is somewhat of the old leaven of Pharisaic assumption and boast in this opening address of Paul, "Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day." Let us examine the position of the speaker. The last time that Paul had been in that Sanhedrim, he was in all probability a member of its Council: he was assuredly an accredited agent of its work, he had gone forth from its assembly with letters and authority to work its will; and from that hour, so far as we know, they had never met. Years had passed away, and they had only heard that he, whom they had sent out to destroy, now preached the faith he once hated and despised. As I have before suggested, there might be still many among its members whom Paul knew, and who well knew Paul; and as he once more, and for the first time, stood before them under such different circumstances, I wonder not that he gazed earnestly and intently, and even lovingly, on many a face that now met his view. And yet he would see no responsive look of kindness to meet his own, no remembrance of earlier days that awakened a thought of tenderness in any bosom save his own. They might anticipate something like wavering or faltering,—some expression of sorrow—perhaps some even looked for recantation and acknow-

ledgment of error—none expected the bold, the unhesitating, uncompromising utterance of his stedfast adherence to his course, and the conviction of his conscience that he was right in the sight of God, "Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day."

In an instant every angry passion in the heart of that proud priest in the seat of justice was aroused; and he commanded one of his officers to smite Paul on his mouth. The Apostle's answer is an indignant and well-merited rebuke; sitting there in the white robe of the high priest to which he had no right, he might well be likened to a whitened wall, or a whitened sepulchre, outwardly fair, but within full of all uncleanness; presuming to intrude into the seat of judgment, and yet commanding him to be smitten contrary to the law. And yet with what calm and quiet dignity does the Apostle leave him to God's justice—"God shall smite thee;" "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord."

Ananias no doubt, at the moment, listened in scorn and contempt, and yet it is possible that these words of the despised Christian may have come with much bitterness into his thoughts when, pursued by murderers, he concealed himself in an aqueduct or watercourse, and was dragged forth and stabbed to death with their daggers. It reminds one of that prophet of Baal in the days of Ahab,

who smote Micaiah the prophet of the Lord on the cheeks, and said in derision to him, "What way went the Spirit of the Lord from me to speak unto thee?" And Micaiah said, "Behold, thou shalt see in that day, when thou shalt go into an inner chamber to hide thyself."

SECTION CIII.

CHAP. XXIII. 4—11. *And they that stood by said, Revilest thou God's high priest? Then said Paul, I wist not, brethren, that he was the high priest: for it is written, Thou shalt not speak evil of the ruler of thy people. But when Paul perceived that the one part were Sadducees, and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, Men and brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee: of the hope and resurrection of the dead I am called in question. And when he had so said, there arose a dissension between the Pharisees and the Sadducees: and the multitude was divided. For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, neither angel, nor spirit; but the Pharisees confess both. And there arose a great cry: and the scribes that were of the Pharisees' part arose, and strove, saying, We find no evil in this man: but if a spirit or an angel hath spoken to him let us not fight against God. And when there arose a great dissension, the chief captain, fearing lest Paul should have been pulled in pieces of them, commanded the soldiers to go down, and to take him by force from among them, and to bring him into the castle. And the night following the Lord stood by him, and said, Be of good cheer, Paul: for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome.*

So cutting a rebuke as Paul gave to Ananias—the more cutting from its truthfulness—was not allowed to pass unnoticed, and accordingly they that stood by and heard what he said, and who no doubt were of the party of Ananias, said to him, "Revilest thou God's high priest?" Paul well knew the reverence due to earthly dignities—"Render to all their dues, honour to whom honour," were his own words, and he here quotes the precept of their own law-giver, "Thou shalt not revile nor speak evil of the ruler of thy people." But Paul would not give honour where honour was not due, and though his words may be taken in a double sense, yet one cannot suppose that he could have been even a single day in Jerusalem without hearing that Jonathan the last high priest had been assassinated, and that no other had been appointed in his room; when therefore he declared "I wist not, brethren, that he was the high priest," he must have meant that he recognized not his pretensions to the office he had assumed, though he couched it in language that might not rudely give needless offence: and I think Ananias pretty well guessed and writhed at Paul's meaning.

The incident, however, too plainly evidenced the tone and spirit of the assembly to permit of any doubt as to the feeling with which they had come to the Council; and Paul therefore adroitly avails himself of the usual state of Jewish parties

in such assemblies, and instead of entering upon a clear and earnest defence of his present views, or endeavouring to awaken some kindly reminiscence of old times by allusions to the past, he at once seizes on the prominent points on which Pharisee and Sadducee differed and disputed, and about which they quarrelled, and hated one another; and thus ingeniously enlists the strong bias and predilection of the one party in his favour. A Pharisee, no doubt, hated the name of Christ, and still more did they hate the name of Paul as the champion of the Gentiles, and the opponent of circumcision; but their hatred of a Sadducee on this occasion, like the rod of Aaron, swallowed up every other serpent. And the result justified the experiment; for, whether Gamaliel himself or his sons were present or not, his spirit was, and the counsel he had years before given in the council-chamber, when the apostles were arraigned before them, and under the same circumstances of divided parties, was now again brought forward for Paul's protection and rescue—"If this counsel or work be of God, ye cannot overthrow it, lest haply ye be found to fight against God," was Gamaliel's counsel—"If a spirit or an angel hath spoken to him, let us not fight against God," was the remonstrance of the Pharisees in this Council.

Had Paul preached Jesus to them—had he declared that God was no respecter of persons,

but that in every nation he that feared God and worked righteousness, be he who he may, Jew or Gentile, bond or free, was accepted of God, and that it was his commission "to make known the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, Christ in them the hope of glory"—had he thus spoken, Sadducee and Pharisee would alike have joined in the cry that had rung through the temple the preceding day, "Away with such a fellow from the earth! It is not fit that he should live." As it was, in the bitterness of their rancour against one another, they forgot their victim, and so violent became the disturbance, so excited their rage, so fierce their gesticulations, that the chief captain, more perplexed than ever, little understanding the cause of all this violence, and only fearing that mischief might befall the prisoner, whom, as a Roman citizen, it was his duty to protect, sends a party of soldiers into the council-chamber with orders to remove Paul to a place of safety in the Castle of Antonio.

How continually are we reminded of the Lord's promise to his disciples, "There shall not an hair of your head perish." As it was with Himself, when warned of the risk He ran from Herod's rage, his reply was, "I must walk to-day and to-morrow, and the day following;" till God's work is finished, no man can set on the Lord's servants to hurt a hair of their heads. It may be, that

some may think the Apostle's conduct hardly consistent with his bold, uncompromising spirit, that it evidenced more of the wisdom of this world, than the undauntedness of the Christian hero; but our Lord himself had said to his disciples, "Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of the wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents;" and one cannot doubt that He, who had bade them, when they should be brought before councils, to take no thought beforehand what they should speak, neither premeditate, but that whatsoever should be given them in that hour, that they were to speak; one cannot doubt, I say, that His Holy Spirit suggested at that moment the very means by which the madness of these parties was overruled for the deliverance of His servant; for, on that very night following, the Lord himself—no deputed angel—no commissioned minister,—but the Lord Jesus Christ stood by his servant as he lay upon his couch and bade him be of good cheer, for that all that was now happening was to further the Lord's purpose, as well as Paul's earnest desire to testify of Jesus at Rome as he had done at Jerusalem. One sees at once, therefore, how such an approval of what Paul had done,—"as thou hast testified of me at Jerusalem"—sanctions the course pursued in the council chamber on the preceding day.

SECTION CIV.

CHAP. XXIII. 12—21. *And when it was day, certain of the Jews banded together, and bound themselves under a curse, saying that they would neither eat nor drink till they had killed Paul. And they were more than forty which had made this conspiracy. And they came to the chief priests and elders, and said, We have bound ourselves under a great curse, that we will eat nothing until we have slain Paul. Now therefore ye with the council signify to the chief captain, that he bring him down unto you to-morrow, as though ye would enquire something more perfectly concerning him: and we, or ever he come near, are ready to kill him. And when Paul's sister's son heard of their lying in wait, he went and entered into the castle, and told Paul. Then Paul called one of the centurions unto him, and said, Bring this young man unto the chief captain: for he hath a certain thing to tell him. So he took him, and brought him to the chief captain, and said, Paul the prisoner called me unto him, and prayed me to bring this young man unto thee, who hath something to say unto thee. Then the chief captain took him by the hand, and went with him aside privately, and asked him, What is that thou hast to tell me? And he said, The Jews have agreed to desire thee, that thou wouldest bring down Paul to-morrow into the council, as though they would enquire somewhat of him more perfectly. But do not thou yield unto them: for there lie in wait for him of them more than forty men, which have bound themselves with an oath, that they will neither eat nor drink till they have killed him: and now are they ready, looking for a promise from thee.*

I THINK we may say of these Jews, who had thus bound themselves by a curse, as the Psalmist said

of some in his day, that "in the net which they hid for another was their own foot taken," and that "in the work of their own hands were they snared." The thought, perhaps, has often occurred to a reader of this incident, what became of these Jews? Did their vow continue to bind them, and did they, like bloodhounds on their prey, continue to track the Apostle's steps, wheresoever he went, in order to fulfil it? The question is, indeed, of no moment; we may well leave them to the uncovenanted mercies of that Being, whose name they so blasphemously invoked; but we may easily believe that men who could look on such a vow as meritorious, and would stop at no falsehood to accomplish their purpose, would without scruple find a way to evade its obligation when no longer practicable, or that its violation would be no painful burden to the consciences of such men. And, besides, we are told by Jewish writers that such an oath or vow for the cutting off of heretics and apostates was considered meritorious; and under circumstances where its accomplishment was impossible or undesirable, absolution from it could be easily procured. I do not wish here to say anything unkind of the Romish Church, but her annals unhappily afford many an instance in which she has fostered and connived at similar undertakings, and conferred similar impunity.

As one reads the narrative in these verses, one

is startled and shocked at the unblushing effrontery with which this band of conspirators present themselves before the chief priests and elders, men in holy office, men conversant and employed in sacred things, ministers of the most high God, and without concealment or abatement disclose and detail to them their whole plot and scheme of assassination, and ask for their connivance and co-operation. And not one word of horror, not one expression of abhorrence or remonstrance, far less any prohibition of the atrocity, is recorded on the part of the high priest and his party. We might say of them, as was said of those who witnessed the burning of the Prophet's roll by Jehudi, "Yet were they not afraid, nor rent their clothes, neither the King nor any of his servants."

It is evident enough that these two parties of Pharisee and Sadducee had made up their quarrel: bitter as was their hatred of one another, and fiercely as it had broken out on the preceding day, they had soon discovered how their unrestrained passions had suffered their victim to escape their grasp; and so, like Herod and Pontius Pilate, they again became friends in their mutual rancour against Paul, and the Master he served. Gebal and Ammon and Amalek are once more confederate against the Lord's hidden ones. And I think this 83d Psalm, from which I have just quoted, is a striking illustration of the Lord's

discomfiture of the devices of His enemies against His servant Paul.

We are now introduced to one in whom we cannot but feel deeply interested—he comes, indeed, like a shadow, and so departs—we have never heard of him before, we never hear of him again—this one incident of his life is all that is recorded, even his name is unknown. And yet what a host of thoughts does this one fact conjure up before us; through what a tangled web of inquiries and pictures does our imagination roam! Paul's sister's son! we go back at once to those young days of Paul's childhood at Tarsus, in the home of his father and his mother, with his sister by his side—perhaps an elder sister, it may be a younger one—but to association with whom we may probably trace much of that tenderness and gentleness and affectionateness of spirit which was so continually manifesting itself in the Apostle's character and demeanour. He has himself recorded the name of his beloved Timothy's mother, Eunice—that name will never be forgotten; like Mary's deed of love in anointing her Lord for His burial, that name, Eunice, will ever be held in memory: but his own mother's name is unknown; whether she died young, or whether she lived to rejoice with her son over the Saviour they had mutually found, or whether she mourned in bitterness of spirit over his alienation from the law of his fathers, we know not.

We should like to know somewhat, too, of his sister. Did his weary pilgrimage ever bring him to that sister's side, and was the intercourse of their childhood ever renewed in later years, to the refreshing of Paul's spirit? or, among the *all things* which Paul surrendered when he took up his cross to follow Christ were father and mother and brother and sister included? One seems to think, perhaps it may be only to hope, that it was not so; and yet this sister's son, so earnest for his uncle's safety, so anxiously watching for every intelligence that concerned his welfare, so regardless of his own safety and the enmity he provoked in making known the plot, and thus frustrating the murderous designs of the conspirators—one seems to think that all this indicates a bond of union between them closer than any tie of earthly relationship, and that, like Philemon of Colosse, he "owed unto him even his own self."

But it is all conjecture, and we must not presume to venture further on vain and unprofitable surmises. It was, however, through the instrumentality of this young man that the Lord provided for His servant's safety; and though it is but little that is recorded, yet that little records a deep debt of the Christian world to his watchfulness and zeal. Happy for us, if the little that may be remembered of us testify of some deed of love to the Saviour's name and cause!

SECTION CV.

CHAP. XXIII. 22—35. *So the chief captain then let the young man depart, and charged him, See thou tell no man that thou hast shewed these things to me. And he called unto him two centurions, saying, Make ready two hundred soldiers to go to Cesarea, and horsemen threescore and ten, and spearmen two hundred, at the third hour of the night; and provide them beasts, that they may set Paul on, and bring him safe unto Felix the governor. And he wrote a letter after this manner: Claudius Lysias unto the most excellent governor Felix sendeth greeting. This man was taken of the Jews, and should have been killed of them: then came I with an army, and rescued him, having understood that he was a Roman. And when I would have known the cause wherefore they accused him, I brought him forth into their council: whom I perceived to be accused of questions of their law, but to have nothing laid to his charge worthy of death or of bonds. And when it was told me how that the Jews laid wait for the man, I sent straightway to thee, and gave commandment to his accusers also to say before thee what they had against him. Farewell. Then the soldiers, as it was commanded them, took Paul, and brought him by night to Antipatris. On the morrow they left the horsemen to go with him, and returned to the castle: who, when they came to Cesarea, and delivered the epistle to the governor, presented Paul also before him. And when the governor had read the letter, he asked of what province he was. And when he understood that he was of Cilicia; I will hear thee, said he, when thine accusers are also come. And he commanded him to be kept in Herod's judgment hall.*

BUT for the warning voice of this young man,

Lysias might easily have fallen into the snare laid for him by these wicked men, who, if they could wreak their own spite and malice, little cared for the consequences to others; or perhaps they trusted to what they would call the chapter of accidents for averting the indignation and vengeance of the Roman officer for the assassination of his prisoner, and that prisoner a Roman citizen, under his protection and safeguard, and on his way to examination and trial. Lysias, perhaps, well knew the Jewish character, how easily moved to sudden outbreak and insurrection, and how stern and resolute and unbending, we might perhaps more truly say, how sullen and ferocious, in carrying out the purposes of their vengeance. And he therefore at once resolves to remove the responsibility from his own shoulders, and the temptation to farther outrage from the Jews, by forthwith despatching Paul to Cesarea to Felix, the Procurator of the province, under cover of night, and with such a guard as might at once check every attempt at violence on the road.

The character of Lysias has come down to us under fairer characters than many other Roman commanders in Judæa, and in contrast with that of Felix stands out in bold outline of superiority. Firm and resolute, active and vigilant as an officer in command, yet moderate and gentle in the exercise of his authority, and at once amenable to the counsels of good sense and the suggestions of

reasonable interference, judicious in deciding and speedy in executing what he considered right,—one almost indulges a hope that, even in this slight and limited intercourse between himself and his prisoner, some seed may have been cast of Paul into the ground of his heart, which continued to spring and grow up he knew not how, till the great harvest-day shall reveal it all.

And yet there are spots in every character; and how difficult, without the grace of God, aye, and with it too, without continual watchfulness and prayer, to walk straight in the path of truth, without turning aside to the right hand or to the left! "Then came I," says Lysias, in his letter to Felix, "and rescued him, having understood that he was a Roman." Now the fact was the direct contrary, that he understood no such thing, but had thought him the Egyptian insurgent, and was proceeding to scourge him under that impression, till restrained by the information "that he was a Roman," and even then he could hardly credit the report. But it told well for the zeal, the promptitude, and character of Lysias that the Procurator should think all was done for the honour of the Roman name: he therefore sinks his mistake as to the Egyptian leader, says not a word of his intended violence towards Paul, but antedates the discovery of the Roman citizenship, and puts all to the account of that discovery. There was, no doubt, a groundwork of truth

running throughout the letter, but it just threw in, as it were, that colouring of falsehood and admixture of perverted fact which answered Lysias' purpose with the Governor best. And thus, as Mr. Goode remarks, "Men find a particular way of representing any transaction *more to their credit* than the simple truth of it would be, and at once they state it accordingly." *

This is the first introduction we have to the Roman Governor Felix, whose name is imperishably linked with that of Paul; but, alas! as that of Pilate is with the name of Jesus, or Herod Antipas with the Baptist, or an earlier Herod with the martyrs of Bethlehem, so the name of Felix is chiefly known to Scripture students for the duplicity and baseness of his conduct towards Paul, and for that miserable self-deception, and fatal avoidance of home-truths, so exemplified in his interview with the Apostle in private. Nor have profane historians been more indulgent to his fame; they have filled up the outline, which Luke has given, and have indelibly stamped his name with eternal infamy. It is no reproach to him that he was by birth a slave, any more than that he was a Greek, for we find one in the very same position in the household of Cæsar, the freedman Narcissus, spoken of by the Apostle in terms of affection and courtesy (Rom. xvi.); and Felix's own brother Pallas, the freedman and

* Rev. F. Goode's Sermons. 1838. Pp. 314-15.

favourite of Claudius, the Roman Emperor, is always represented under a far brighter character. Felix, however, was a sensualist; and I think we may trace throughout all history and biography how thoroughly a life of sensuality and profligacy, and the indulgence of base appetites, not only degrades the man, but weakens the intellect, debases the understanding, and sinks the whole tone and temper and spirit of a man's mind to a low and grovelling level. Felix had been a slave, but though he had emerged into high rank and station, he never lost the spirit of a slave; and the historian of the time has condensed in one line the character of Felix with all the truthfulness of the biographer, and the biting sarcasm of the satirist, "that in all cruelty and licentiousness he exercised the functions of a king with the spirit of a slave."* His connexion with Drusilla evidences his sensuality; his supposed assassination of Jonathan the High Priest by hired murderers,† and his treacherous betrayal of Eleazar,

* "Per omnem sævitiam et libidinem jus regium ingenio servili exercuit."—*Tacit. Hist., v.* 9.

† Jonathan had remonstrated with Felix on his exactions and injustice, and Felix, nettled at his language, bribed a man of the name of Doras to assassinate him. Doras hired some of the assassins of the day, who, watching their opportunity in the temple at the Passover, plunged their daggers in his heart: and, through the contrivance of Felix, all inquiry was hushed, and the perpetrators escaped without punishment.—*Vide Lewin's Life, vol. ii., p.* 640.

and forfeiture of his word and pledge,* betoken the cruelty of his disposition, while the meanness and injustice of his conduct towards Paul in retaining him in custody for upwards of two years to please the Jews, and conciliate their report in his favour, shows that there were few depths of degradation to which he was not ready to stoop for his own base ends and purposes.

This chapter, however, simply introduces him to our notice. Paul reaches Cesarea in safety under the protection of the escort provided for him; the officer in command presents the letter from Lysias and delivers up his prisoner, and Felix having ascertained from what province he came, and that his own jurisdiction really extended to his case, merely remarked, "I will hear thee when thine accusers are also come," ordered him to be kept in safe but easy custody. And yet this imprisonment, we know, with all the boasted privilege of Roman citizenship, lasted both at Cesarea and at Rome for nearly five protracted years.

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* Eleazar was a bandit-leader of notoriety, who had long baffled all the efforts of Felix, but was at length induced to surrender by the most solemn pledges of honourable treatment and safety; but no sooner had he done so, than he was thrown into chains, and sent prisoner to Rome.—*Joseph. Antiq., xx.* 8, 5.

SECTION CVI.

CHAP. XXIV. 1—23. *And after five days Ananias the high priest descended with the elders, and with a certain orator named Tertullus, who informed the governor against Paul. And when he was called forth, Tertullus began to accuse him, saying, Seeing that by thee we enjoy great quietness, and that very worthy deeds are done unto this nation by thy providence, we accept it always, and in all places, most noble Felix, with all thankfulness. Notwithstanding, that I be not further tedious unto thee, I pray thee that thou wouldest hear us of thy clemency a few words. For we have found this man a pestilent fellow, and a mover of sedition among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes: who also hath gone about to profane the temple: whom we took, and would have judged according to our law. But the chief captain Lysias came upon us, and with great violence took him away out of our hands, commanding his accusers to come unto thee: by examining of whom thyself mayest take knowledge of all these things, whereof we accuse him. And the Jews also assented, saying that these things were so. Then Paul, after that the governor had beckoned unto him to speak, answered, Forasmuch as I know that thou hast been of many years a judge unto this nation, I do the more cheerfully answer for myself: because that thou mayest understand, that there are yet but twelve days since I went up to Jerusalem for to worship. And they neither found me in the temple disputing with any man, neither raising up the people, neither in the synagogues, nor in the city: neither can they prove the things whereof they now accuse me. But this I confess unto thee, that after the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the law and in the prophets:*

and have hope toward God, which they themselves also allow, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust. And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men. Now after many years I came to bring alms to my nation, and offerings. Whereupon certain Jews from Asia found me purified in the temple, neither with multitude, nor with tumult. Who ought to have been here before thee, and object, if they had ought against me. Or else let these same here say, if they have found any evil doing in me, while I stood before the council, except it be for this one voice, that I cried standing among them, Touching the resurrection of the dead I am called in question by you this day. And when Felix heard these things, having more perfect knowledge of that way, he deferred them, and said, When Lysias the chief captain shall come down, I will know the uttermost of your matter. And he commanded a centurion to keep Paul, and to let him have liberty, and that he should forbid none of his acquaintance to minister or come unto him.

At the first glance one is not disposed to have a very high idea of the oratory of this Tertullus, and one almost wonders that Ananias and his party should have been at the trouble to take down with them to Cesarea a hired advocate so poor and insignificant to urge their charge against Paul. It shows, however, not only the deep malignity of their nature, which would leave no chance unemployed to ensure conviction; but it shows also how wonderfully the Gospel had grown in power and importance since those first and almost puny days, when it was thought a sufficient check to command the Apostles not to speak at

all nor teach in the name of Jesus. And now we find an High Priest, or at least one who claimed and assumed the rank, with elders and others in authority, going down from Jerusalem to Cesarea with an hired orator to plead their cause before the Roman tribunals against one poor feeble prisoner!

And yet when we look more narrowly into what is reported of this speech of Tertullus, for they are but mere notes that have come down to us, we see the germs of consummate skill and flattery, adroitly touching on the topics that could gain a favourable hearing from the judge, and conciliating his good-will by bringing forward those deeds for which Felix certainly deserved credit.* And then in bringing forward the charge against the prisoner, he gives prominence to those points which would be more likely to ensure attention from a heathen governor, by representing Paul as one whose vocation it was to go from place to place throughout the world, to stir up disaffection and sedition among the Jewish population against the peace of the Roman empire, and the authority of the Emperor, and that he was especially looked upon among them

* In the earlier period of his government Felix had been successful in putting down various bands of robber-chiefs, who were continually disturbing the peace of Judea, and shortly before Paul's apprehension had quelled that insurrection of the Egyptian rebel, to which Lysias alludes.

as the ringleader, or rather the standard-bearer, among the pestilential sect of the Nazarenes. He then gradually slides into the charge on which Paul had been imprisoned and was now arraigned before Felix, that of profaning the temple by introducing Gentiles into the holy place, and thus violating that law, which Rome herself had enacted and sanctioned, and which forbade any heathen to enter within the sacred precincts. The whole of the proceedings of that day, when all Jerusalem was in an uproar, and of the following day when such a scene of unseemly altercation occurred in the very sanhedrim, he represents as a grave judicial proceeding, according to the strict tenour and decorum of the law, "whom we took, and would have judged according to our law." And then, as Lysias was not present to refute the charge or justify his conduct, he quietly insinuated that the chief captain had rudely and illegally come upon them, and with great violence interrupted their proceeding by taking their prisoner out of their hands. There was, you see, just that shade of truth, and high colouring of falsehood, so often found when passion usurps the place of judgment, and prejudice and malice are found ready to adopt every means rather than forego their end. And it was but natural that at the close of this speech of Tertullus, his employers hesitated not a moment to vouch for its correctness and accuracy.

Such was the one-sided statement of the accuser, enforced by the eloquence of the advocate, backed by the testimony and sanctioned by the influence of Ananias and his Jewish elders. Paul's reply and defence of himself is at once dignified, courteous, and simple; he congratulates himself that he has to speak before one, whose long residence in Judea, and station as its governor, had no doubt rendered him sufficiently familiar with its customs to know that a few days only had elapsed since that feast, which had first brought him to Jerusalem, that only twelve days had passed since he had quitted Cesarea to be present at it, that of those days it could be well ascertained how many had been spent in imprisonment and bondage, and that it was preposterous to suppose that the brief remainder could have been employed in stirring up sedition and organizing insurrection, and that too by one, who, as Felix must have well known, had not been for years within his province. He calmly asserts his innocence of the various charges brought against him with regard to the profanation of the temple, and significantly alludes to the absence of every witness, and especially of those Ephesian Jews, who had first raised the outcry.

He then, without fear or compromise, avows himself a worshipper of the God of his fathers; and, however they might call it heresy or the opinions of a sect, he himself believed all things

which were written in their law and the Prophets; nay, that the very doctrine which his accusers themselves so resolutely maintained and upheld, was the fundamental article of his own creed, and which he so continually preached, that there should be a resurrection of the dead both of the just and of the unjust; and not only did he preach this to others, but it was to himself the constraining motive to preserve a conscience void of all reproach or condemnation from God or man.

He glances at the motives which had brought him to Jerusalem to show that no unkindness could be in his heart towards his countrymen in bringing them alms, and no irreverence meant towards the temple, to which he had presented the usual offerings of a pious worshipper. Paul's defence of himself was conclusive as regarded the opinion of Felix, who at once saw that there was no question which rendered him legally amenable either to Jewish or Roman law; but like many a vacillating man and unjust judge, he attempted a compromise. He would not surrender Paul to his accusers, nor would he offend and exasperate them by setting him altogether at liberty; and therefore, under pretence of waiting for the further evidence of Lysias, for whom, however, he never sends and who does not come, he consigns Paul to still longer confinement and military custody.

SECTION CVII.

CHAP. XXIV. 24—25. *And after certain days, when Felix came with his wife Drusilla, which was a Jewess, he sent for Paul, and heard him concerning the faith in Christ. And as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled, and answered, Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee.*

THE sacred historian does not enter into any particulars of what we may call the private history of the times. This is the first and only time we read of Drusilla, and here she is simply called the wife of Felix, and a Jewess; and though it was not strictly prohibited for a Jewess to intermarry with a Gentile, even while a heathen, it was at least an union which betokened no deep sense of religious responsibility and privilege. But in reality Drusilla was no wife of Felix; in one sense, like that woman of Samaria whom the Saviour met with at Jacob's well, "he whom she now had was not her husband," but, unlike that woman, she turned away both from Jesus and his servant.

We meet with another Jewess in the following chapter, Bernice, who was the elder sister of Drusilla, and alas! like her, of equally and perhaps still more tainted fame. They were sisters of the King Agrippa, mentioned in the

next chapter, and daughters of that Herod Agrippa, who died so miserably at Cesarea, smitten of God, and eaten up of worms.

We have mentioned in a preceding section * the account of Josephus with regard to a sorcerer bearing the name of Simon Magus, being employed by Felix to carry on an intrigue with Drusilla, and persuade her to leave her husband and live with him; and though no doubt divorces could be procured with almost fatal facility, still in the sight of God the original taint of adultery rested both on Felix and his paramour.

One can hardly fancy the reasons which induced Felix in the first instance to send for Paul; it is, indeed, distinctly stated that it was to hear him "concerning the faith in Christ;" but Felix could have no interest in that subject,—he could have no desire to know aught respecting the Crucified of Nazareth. His was no inquiring mind seeking after truth if haply he might find it; he had not in the remotest degree that spirit of philosophical investigation which could take an interest in questions which have exercised the profoundest intellects of antiquity, far less could he wish to be disturbed in that dream of voluptuous sensuality in which he was living. I believe his only idea of Paul could be that he was a harmless visionary, and that the Roman Procurator of Judæa and the ringleader of the sect of the

* Section xxxix., note.

Nazarenes had about as little in common as the Emperor on his throne, and a beggar on the Bridge.

As this interview with Paul is here connected with the introduction of Drusilla for the first and only time, I think we may fairly conclude that it was to gratify her that Felix thus admitted the Apostle to a more private audience. As a Jewess, she would naturally feel an interest—perhaps it might be only a curiosity—to hear more of that new religion, which, as Paul preached, was to supersede the law of Moses. She had, no doubt, heard it canvassed; her own childish wonder perhaps had been excited as the tale may have reached her ears of Peter's miraculous deliverance out of her father's hands: and now that an opportunity occurred to indulge her curiosity, she easily induced Felix to assent to the proposal.

Never, perhaps, has there been a passage of Scripture more commented on than this,—never an address from one man to another more striking —never the circumstances of an interview between two persons so dissimilar in position been so familiarly brought before us as in this of Paul before Felix. And what is, perhaps, most striking of all, as it certainly is saddest of all, is, that, as far as we know, all passed away without the slightest permanent result. Paul preached, and Felix trembled; the prisoner denounced the judgment to come, and the judge quailed before the

thought. Paul urged home with bold and dauntless energy those holy truths of righteousness and temperance, backed by an appeal to that day of solemn account, when Felix and Drusilla would themselves stand before the judgment-seat of Christ to give account of the things done in the body—and for a moment the voice of conscience was heard. But as one gazes at the cloud in the sky, it loses its form and shape and disappears even as we look—as we see the dew-drop on the blade of grass glittering in the morning light, it evaporates as we gaze, and sparkles no more—as one leaves the track of a foot-print on the sand, and the tide washes over it, and it is seen no more—as the echo of a passing sound dies into air, and is not heard again—as a man beholding his natural face in a glass, goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was—so it was with Felix! He heard and trembled, the surface was stirred, truth for a moment found its way through the barred and closed door of his conscience, but was instantly thrust out, and never readmitted.

It has been said the convenient season never came to Felix, but in one sense it did come, and often too; and often did he send for Paul, and often did he commune with him; but conscience never again responded, conscience never more lifted up her voice; he had crushed it with an iron heel, and it happened unto him according to

the true proverb, "The dog turned to his own vomit again, and the sow to her wallowing in the mire." And as for Drusilla, a dark veil is drawn over her future course. All that we know is, that she perished miserably with her child, the child of Felix, in an eruption of Mount Vesuvius.*

Alas! among the many bitter memories which will sweep over the spirits of the lost in hell, the remembrance of opportunities abused or unheeded will be the most bitter. That day when Paul stood before Felix, and preached of righteousness, of temperance, and a judgment to come, is perhaps the one most indelibly stamped on that doomed one's memory.

SECTION CVIII.

CHAP. XXIV. 26, 27; XXV. 1—8. *He hoped also that money should have been given him of Paul, that he might loose him; wherefore he sent for him the oftener, and communed with him, But after two years Porcius Festus came into Felix' room: and Felix, willing to show the Jews a pleasure, left Paul bound. Now, when Festus was come into the province, after three days he ascended from Cesarea to Jerusalem. Then the high priest and the chief of the Jews informed him against Paul, and besought him, and desired favour against him, that he would send for him to Jerusalem, laying wait in the way to kill him. But Festus answered, that Paul should be kept at Cesarea,*

* Howson and Conybeare, vol. ii.

and that he himself would depart shortly thither. Let them therefore, said he, which among you are able go down with me, and accuse this man, if there be any wickedness in him. And when he had tarried among them more than ten days, he went down unto Cesarea; and the next day sitting on the judgment-seat, commanded Paul to be brought. And when he was come, the Jews which came down from Jerusalem stood round about, and laid many and grievous complaints against Paul, which they could not prove. While he answered for himself, Neither against the law of the Jews, neither against the temple, nor yet against Cæsar, have I offended anything at all.

THE conclusion of this 24th chapter at once shows us how utterly worthless and transient was the effect produced on the mind of Felix by Paul's preaching. Never was there a more fearful and melancholy illustration of the way-side hearers in our Lord's parable of the sower, where the devil instantly snatched up the seed that was scattered and lay upon the hardened and beaten surface, and not a sign nor symptom of vegetation or growth could follow. Paul's words did not apparently leave even a sting behind in his wounded conscience: many a man feels towards a preacher who has hit him hard, as Ahab felt towards Micaiah, when he said, "I hate him because he doth not prophesy good concerning me, but evil."

There was no feeling, however, of this sort in the mind of Felix; he felt no fears after the first

panic, the first surprise, had subsided and evaporated; and if, in the many interviews which took place between him and his prisoner, when it is said he frequently sent for him and communed with him, we might have hoped that some softened feeling had arisen, some awakened impulse, some conviction that could not be repressed, some yearning of the spirit after better and holier things had begun to germinate and give promise of fruit—we are left in no doubt as to the motive of all this anxiety for interviews, and can feel no surprise at the result of all this communing with his prisoner. Cruelty and licentiousness are the indelible spots in the character of Felix, stamped and fixed for ever in the page of the Roman historian; and Felix little thought that when he sent for Paul to try and extort a bribe of money for his release, that there was then living, and most probably in Cesarea at the time, one who should be the annalist of that prisoner's acts, and should hand down to the execration and scorn of every age the unutterable baseness and meanness of that spirit which was ready to barter justice for a bribe, and at length after two years' detention in captivity, when himself recalled for his crimes, still left him in chains in order if possible to curry favour and good-will from the people, who hated him for his cruelty, rapacity, and oppression,

and whom he thought by this sop to conciliate in the evidence they were prepared to give against him.

Of Festus we know but little, save what is recorded here, and that little is perhaps to his credit. But what this portion of the 25th chapter so painfully records is the deep-rooted malignity and inveterate hatred of the Jews against Paul and the doctrines he preached. Two years and upwards had passed since that day when their victim had so nearly perished by their hands and was only rescued by the prompt interference of a military guard. Two years had elapsed since that band of more than forty men had bound themselves under a curse neither to eat nor to drink till they had killed Paul; and though they had of course either been absolved or had absolved themselves, they had inwardly chafed at the barriers which kept Paul out of their reach, and longed for an opportunity to renew their attempt. Thus for two whole years and more had this scheme and purpose of murder rankled in their hearts; and the first act, the first favour they beg of their newly appointed governor, amid the very congratulations and courtesies and compliments on his arrival at Jerusalem is a snare to enable them to carry out their long-protracted scheme of assassination. They besought Festus to send for Paul from Cesarea, not, as they perhaps alleged, that he

might be tried before the solemn council of their nation, and by those appointed judges best qualified to decide on such questions—not that justice might have its free and unimpeded course —but "that they might kill him by the way."

I know not whether Festus suspected or had intelligence of their design—I know not whether that young man, Paul's sister's son, was still at Jerusalem, and got knowledge of the plot; but Festus at once refused the petition, apparently trivial as it was, and, what was more, apparently just and proper in its claim. In all probability, however, Festus acted simply for his own convenience; he had other matters to engage his attention during his short stay at Jerusalem, nor did he want to be harassed and perplexed about a question in which he could be but little interested, nor would he run the risk of being detained, when he was anxious to reach Cesarea with as little delay as possible. He therefore intimates his purpose of returning thither, and desires Paul's accusers to follow and prefer their charge.

There was no delay of justice, as in the case of Felix; for on the very day after his arrival, Paul once more stood before the Governor, and boldly asserted his innocence of every charge. How strikingly is man's malice exemplified in these words, "they laid many complaints against Paul, which they could not prove." It was not the first time, nor was Paul the first prisoner, against whom

false evidence was alleged: even in Jerusalem, in their own Sanhedrim, some thirty years before, there stood a meek and uncomplaining Prisoner, against whom many bare false witness, but their witness agreed not together; and so, as they had testified falsely against the Master, they now laid many complaints against His servant, 'which they were not able to prove.'

SECTION CIX.

CHAP. XXV. 9—21. *But Festus, willing to do the Jews a pleasure, answered Paul, and said, Wilt thou go up to Jerusalem, and there be judged of these things before me? Then said Paul, I stand at Cæsar's judgment seat, where I ought to be judged: to the Jews have I done no wrong, as thou very well knowest. For if I be an offender, or have committed anything worthy of death, I refuse not to die: but if there be none of these things whereof these accuse me, no man may deliver me unto them. I appeal unto Cæsar. Then Festus, when he had conferred with the council, answered, Hast thou appealed unto Cæsar? unto Cæsar shalt thou go. And after certain days king Agrippa and Bernice came unto Cesarea to salute Festus. And when they had been there many days, Festus declared Paul's cause unto the king, saying, There is a certain man left in bonds by Felix: about whom, when I was at Jerusalem, the chief priests and the elders of the Jews, informed me, desiring to have judgment against him. To whom I answered, It is not the manner of the Romans to deliver any man to die, before that he which is accused have the*

accusers face to face, and have licence to answer for himself concerning the crime laid against him. Therefore, when they were come hither, without any delay on the morrow I sat on the judgment seat, and commanded the man to be brought forth. Against whom when the accusers stood up, they brought none accusation of such things as I supposed: but had certain questions against him of their own superstition, and of one Jesus, which was dead, whom Paul affirmed to be alive. And because I doubted of such manner of questions, I asked him whether he would go to Jerusalem, and there be judged of these matters. But when Paul had appealed to be reserved unto the hearing of Augustus, I commanded him to be kept till I might send him to Cæsar.

THERE is a peculiarity in reading the transactions of a past period over those of the present time, which no doubt occurs to each reader, that every actor in the scene has long since passed away, and that we now sit, with stern, unbiassed feeling, to give in our verdict and pass our sentence on those actions and motives which were at the time too carefully concealed from the scrutiny of their fellow-men for an impartial judgment to be exercised. Felix and Drusilla, Agrippa and Bernice, Ananias and Tertullus, Festus and his Council, stand before a more unerring bar than that before which Paul stood, even the tribunal of posterity; but we must remember that the student of sacred Scripture has an immense advantage over the mere reader of history—that he has for his guidance the very clue which the Holy Spirit has put into his hands to lead him aright. He is not

left to vague surmise or uncertain conjecture, to fallible reasoning or mistaken inferences: he has the sure Word of God to direct, and those characters and agents in the world's scenes, which once stood forth in such gay and glittering colours in the eyes of their contemporaries, are now shrunk into their own puny and insignificant dimensions. It is a solemn and judicial mockery which the Lord has written, not only on the actors, but on the very scene itself where all this pageantry and pretence of Paul's trial took place; and the present aspect of the royal and magnificent city of Cesarea, in its utter desolation and ruin, is perhaps the best commentary that can be given on those that once dwelt within her palaces.

It would not appear that Festus, though willing to do the Jews a pleasure, was ready to do it at the expense of justice. The very choice which he offers to Paul is an evidence that he had no purpose to compel his prisoner to accede to his proposal, and even at Jerusalem he intimated his intention to preside at his trial—"Wilt thou go up to Jerusalem, and there be judged of these things *before me?*" Nor does Paul's answer, though at once rejecting all idea of going to Jerusalem to be tried, seem to me as if he in any degree uncourteously declined the jurisdiction of Festus also. "To the Jews he had done no wrong, as Festus himself well knew," and if he had committed aught against Cæsar he was a

Roman citizen, and had a right to be tried at the legal and appointed tribunal where he was now standing, even at Cæsar's judgment-seat, in Cesarea, and before Cæsar's deputy. "*I stand* at Cæsar's judgment-seat, where I ought to be judged"—I appeal from Jews and Jewish judicature to Cæsar's tribunal and Cæsar's judge.*

* Mr. Howson, in his twenty-second chapter (note), asserts that the mere pronunciation of the word "Appello" at once suspended all proceedings, and that "by the mere pronunciation of these potent words, 'I appeal unto Cæsar,'" he instantly removed his cause from the jurisdiction of the magistrate before whom he stood, and transferred it to the supreme tribunal of the Emperor at Rome; and Mr. Lewin takes the same view. With all deference to authorities so eminent, I would still suggest some ground for the view in the text. It is true a final appeal was made to the Emperor both in civil and criminal affairs, but Caligula, not very long before, had prohibited any appeal to himself (Suet. Calig. 16), and Nero, the present Emperor, had ordered all appeals, in the first instance at least, to be made from private judges to the Senate. (Suet. Ner. 17.) Were the pronunciation of that magic word, 'Appello,' so irresistible and irreversible, what need of Festus submitting the matter to his council? But if Festus, perplexed by the novelty of questions so little familiar to himself, and startled at the responsibility which Paul's appeal to his own judgment-seat, as Cæsar's deputy, entailed, referred the matter to his council, then I cannot but think that we have a plain and consistent meaning in the decision to which the Procurator came. "Hast thou appealed unto Cæsar's judgment-seat, at which thou art now standing? Be it so—unto *Cæsar's self* thou shalt go." I confess that this seems to me a fairer solution than Mr.

One can hardly imagine that Paul appealed unto Cæsar himself, or that he expected or even desired to be sent to Rome for the purpose of obtaining a fairer trial than he would find at Cesarea. Anxious as he was to go to that city, and though he knew it to be his Lord's will and purpose that he should testify of Him at Rome as he had done at Jerusalem, he could scarcely have supposed that it would be the Lord's way to send him there a prisoner in bonds to preach the Gospel or testify of Jesus; and I think we may truly say that such would not have been his own choice; and yet his appeal to Cæsar would of necessity have left no alternative. All that he gathered from the vision that had been vouchsafed to him (xxiii. 11) was that he should be delivered from all harm, and that, in the Lord's own time and way, he should testify of Jesus at Rome as he had done in Jerusalem. I cannot, therefore, think it improbable that the decision which Festus, acting

Lewin's supposition that the reply of Festus was a petulant expression under a feeling of personal affront from Paul. I acknowledge that ver. 21 bears on the face of it a confirmation of the generally received opinion; but Festus is there simply stating the result, that, the cause being now referred to Cæsar, Paul was retained in custody till he could be sent to Rome. Nor do I think that Paul's own statement to the Jews at Rome, on his arrival there, "I was constrained to appeal unto Cæsar," is contradictory of the view in the text. He had appealed from his own countrymen to Cæsar's judgment-seat, and that appeal had now brought him to Rome.

under the advice of his council, came to of transferring Paul and his cause to the jurisdiction and cognisance of the Emperor himself, came upon him by surprise; and though he at once, no doubt, recognised the Lord's hand in the arrangement, still, in one sense, God's ways were not the Apostle's ways, or, rather, the ways he would himself have chosen.

Festus, however, still had a difficulty as to the report he should make to the Roman Emperor with regard to the charge against Paul. He was new to the province, and little cognizant of Jewish questions and Jewish faith; and he therefore gladly avails himself of a visit of ceremony and courtesy from Agrippa and his sister Bernice to lay the question before him. This address of Festus to Agrippa is a noble exposition of what justice demands, and what Roman justice put forth to the world as its rule; but, alas! courts of human judicature have been too often like individuals, who

'Know the best, and yet the worst pursue.'

This golden rule of Roman law should be written up in every court of justice in the world—far beyond that covering of the seat of judgment which Cambyses is said to have spread over it, the skin of an unjust judge, bidding his successor remember whereon he sate.

Festus here certainly alleges to Agrippa a different motive for having wished the trial to

take place at Jerusalem to what is stated in the 9th verse. In the one, it was from a desire "to do the Jews a pleasure;" in the present statement, it is because he doubted of his own inability to decide on such manner of questions satisfactorily. Mr. Goode looks on this as another instance of that tampering with strict truth of which Lysias in his letter to Felix had been guilty. And yet the statements are not contradictory, nor at variance with fact; they are perfectly compatible, and Festus, without any impeachment of his veracity, might in his address to Agrippa state the one motive and withhold the other. I think, however, that in matters where truth is at stake a rigid observance even of the very letter is far safer than that laxity which keeps, indeed, within the confines, but still goes to the extreme edge; and that a really conscientious spirit will shrink from that praise which is obtained as much by a more highly-coloured statement of some circumstances as by a keeping out of sight those which are not so favourable, in both cases, perhaps, not strictly consistent with exact truth.*

* There is a case very much in point mentioned in the Book of Jeremiah, where the Prophet is summoned from his dungeon into the presence of Zedekiah the King, and earnestly presses upon the monarch to surrender to the Babylonians. On his dismissal he is desired by Zedekiah, if any question is asked him as to the purport of their conference, to answer that he had presented a supplication unto

SECTION CX.

CHAP. XXV. 22—27. *Then Agrippa said unto Festus, I would also hear the man myself. To-morrow, said he, thou shalt hear him. And on the morrow, when Agrippa was come, and Bernice, with great pomp, and was entered into the place of hearing, with the chief captains and principal men of the city, at Festus' commandment Paul was brought forth. And Festus said, King Agrippa, and all men which are here present with us, ye see this man, about whom all the multitude of the Jews have dealt with me, both at Jerusalem, and also here, crying that he ought not to live any longer. But when I found that he had committed nothing worthy of death, and that he himself hath appealed to Augustus, I have determined to send him. Of whom I have no certain thing to write unto my lord. Wherefore I have brought him forth before you, and specially before thee, O king Agrippa, that, after examination had, I might have somewhat to write. For it seemeth to me unreasonable to send a prisoner, and not withal to signify the crimes laid against him.*

As we read the accounts of this day's proceedings in Cesarea, one seems to think that there was a vast deal of unnecessary pomp and parade in this trial of one poor persecuted prisoner. To the

the King for his deliverance out of prison, which he probably had done. This was, perhaps, no denial of the truth, but it was at least a holding back, and so far a misleading of others into a false belief. No question, it may be said, had any right to be asked, and therefore Jeremiah no need to answer; but I cannot help thinking the monarch's counsel wrong, and the prophet's reply evasive, and therefore unbecoming.

eye of a casual spectator, unconscious of the cause of the day's solemnity, it would have appeared as if some prisoner of the highest rank or the most daring courage was to be arraigned in this judgment hall at Cesarea, and that every arrangement was made for the most imposing manifestation and display of judicial solemnity and splendour, as well as every precaution taken, that the prisoner should have no chance of escape or rescue. I know not if Roman troops lined the hall, but there was no lack of military splendour nor martial pomp in the presence of the Chiliarchs or chief commanders of the Imperial troops stationed at Cesarea; and mingled with them, or perhaps in their separate seats, the chief men of the city and members of the Council, who had all assembled on this day, by command of Festus, to do honour to Agrippa, and add solemnity to the occasion. Festus himself takes his place on the seat of justice, and by his side Agrippa and Bernice with "great pomp" and display of royal magnificence on thrones prepared for them.

And now when the expectations of the assembly are raised to the highest pitch, the prisoner is ushered in: and who is it for whom all this paraphernalia of justice is prepared? We hardly know Paul's personal appearance, though so much has been said on the subject; but without going to the improbable lengths of bodily defects, which some have imputed to him, as that "he

was deformed, and bald, and blear-eyed, that he had an impediment in his speech, that his voice was shrill and harsh, and his delivery ungraceful," we may readily believe that he was not of commanding stature nor appearance, and that he bore in every feature the look of suffering and of pain, that his gait was feeble, and, perhaps, as on this day he entered the Judgment Hall, there might be still more visible traces of that lengthened imprisonment and anxiety of spirit about those for whose spiritual welfare he was so deeply concerned, and from whom he had now been so long separated. We must remember, too, that Paul entered in bonds,—that he was bound by a chain to a Roman soldier,—and one cannot help feeling how striking to the mere spectator must have been the contrast between this poor, enfeebled, melancholy man, and the gay and gorgeous assembly that had gathered on this "Roman holiday."

And yet I never can believe that Paul's "presence was weak," or "his speech contemptible," though Athenians might call him "babbler" or Corinthians despise him. I never can believe that he, on whose words an audience hung till midnight closed, or at whose faithful preaching, even when a prisoner, his judge quailed and trembled, and whose power of attaching hearts to himself was so strong, that when about to part from some, among whom he had preached for

more than two years, "they fell on his neck and kissed him, sorrowing most of all for the words that he had spoken that they should see his face no more," and of others it is recorded that "they were ready to pluck out their own eyes and give them to him" in a season of great bodily infirmity and sickness—I never can believe, I say, that such a man was deficient even in those outward requisites, which, humanly speaking, add so much importance to a cause; and had we no other evidence than the proceedings of this day in the Judgment Hall at Cesarea, they alone afford abundant evidence that this great Apostle of the Gentiles was singularly adapted both by nature and by grace, as well as specially raised up of God, and fitted to stand before kings and rulers for His name's sake.

Nor, indeed, was the contrast so great, or the power and the might and the majesty in reality on the side, which would strike the eye of the casual spectator we have supposed. Though Paul, in the eyes of those around him, was but 'the ringleader of the sect of Nazarenes,' as Tertullus invidiously called him, he was in reality the 'standard-bearer' of the cross of Christ, the representative of the Gospel, the ambassador of the Lord of Hosts! The pomp and pageant of that day has long since passed away: Festus in his pride of station, Agrippa in his kingly robes, Bernice

in her fatal beauty, and all the agents in that scene, whose names scarcely reached beyond the roll-calls of their cohorts, nay, palace and Prætorium, judgment-hall and audience-chamber, and Cesarea itself have become only "a ruin of ruins:" and Paul alone stands forth, to use the words of Gibbon, "a column in a scene of ruins;" and were it not for the name of that chained prisoner, that day's pageantry would have been but as children's tracks on the sea-shore, which the next tide would have swept over and blotted out for ever.

SECTION CXI.

CHAP. XXVI. 1—8. *Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Thou art permitted to speak for thyself. Then Paul stretched forth the hand, and answered for himself: I think myself happy, king Agrippa, because I shall answer for myself this day before thee touching all the things whereof I am accused of the Jews: especially because I know thee to be expert in all customs and questions which are among the Jews: wherefore I beseech thee to hear me patiently. My manner of life from my youth, which was at the first among mine own nation at Jerusalem, know all the Jews: which knew me from the beginning, if they would testify, that after the most straitest sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee. And now I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise made of God unto our fathers: unto which promise our twelve tribes, instantly serving God day and*

night, hope to come. For which hope's sake, king Agrippa, I am accused of the Jews. Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead?

I HAVE in the preceding Section called this day's proceedings in the judgment-hall of Cesarea a trial, but it was in reality no trial at all. No charges were alleged in court against the prisoner—no accusers stood face-to-face with the accused, no witnesses substantiated the charge, or gave evidence against him; and what is most striking of all, after the first sentence Paul almost altogether passes by every accusation as if none had ever been made, puts aside as unworthy of a moment's notice every personal allegation, loses every thought of his own position as a prisoner, and stands before that assembly in the earnest and all-absorbing attitude of one who had life and death in his own hands to proclaim and offer to those who were listening to him. We have many specimens of Paul's masterly addresses to the various audiences before whom he stood, but this speech before Festus and Agrippa is acknowledged of all to be the most striking, and its touching conclusion and personal appeal to Agrippa stands unrivalled amid all the bursts of eloquence or pathos which have fallen from human lips.

As I have said, Paul's address is in no degree a defence of himself from charges made against him; he stands before that assembly to give

account of his faith in Jesus, and why and wherein it is that he differs from those among whom he had himself been brought up and educated, and of whose tenets he had been so long the advocate. It was especially, perhaps we might say exclusively, to Agrippa that Paul addressed himself; and though the little that is known of that monarch from other sources is but to his reproach, yet I think few can read this chapter without having their sympathies enlisted on behalf of one for whom Paul's spirit so intently yearned, and in whose behalf he uttered so touching and earnest a desire.

We must look, then, on Paul's speech as an explanatory statement why he became a Christian, or, in Peter's words, as giving an answer to them that asked him the reason of the hope that was in him. It was undoubtedly an advantage to speak in the presence of one who, himself a Jew, or at least educated in the Jewish faith, was conversant with all the customs and questions appertaining to Jewish matters, and could intelligibly follow Paul through all the reasonings and statements of his address. It was different with Festus: to him Paul's explanation seemed but the incoherent jargon of a bewildered enthusiast, whose intellect had given way beneath the pressure of over-exciting study.

However, let us turn to the speech itself—why did Paul become a Christian? Had his early

training and education paved the way for such a change, had he been incidentally thrown into association with those who might have gradually weakened his prejudices, and so won him over step by step to the faith in Christ—or had the name of Jesus of Nazareth been so brought before him in all the winning attractiveness of his life of benevolence and love that it had become a name of interest and endearment? There was nothing of the kind; he could appeal to every Jew in Jerusalem, to the very persons who had known him from the first, from his early youth, if they would but testify, that, both in profession and in practice, after the straitest sect of their religion, he had lived a Pharisee.

"And now," he goes on to say, what is it for which I stand here this day? for what am I called in question, as if I had introduced some new and strange doctrine, and was putting forward some hope and promise of which neither ourselves nor our fathers had before heard?" So far from this, it is the very promise which was made of God aforetime to our fathers, which cheered and sustained them, when "they went from one nation to another, from one kingdom to another people." "These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were persuaded of them and embraced them," and unto which promise even the scattered tribes, though lost and hidden from

man's sight now, but still undiminished in number, still to be gathered in their unbroken unity, hope to come—even that promised Saviour in whom, as foretold to Abraham, all the nations of the earth should be blessed—that promise, which, as Paul afterwards wrote, "is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death and brought immortality to light through the Gospel."

It is evident that Agrippa was a Sadducee in heart and faith, if not in name: the doctrine of a resurrection and of a judgment to come must have been as full of discomfort and fearfulness to him and Bernice as to Felix and Drusilla. The Apostle, perhaps, saw some expression in his look, which betokened incredulity and scorn, for he immediately breaks out into one of those striking and animated appeals which are so conspicuous in this speech, "For this hope's sake stand I here this day—What! King Agrippa, is it a thing incredible with you, who know our Jewish Scriptures, that God should raise the dead? and if so—if God in time past, and in our own time too, hath raised the dead, is it then beyond or contrary to belief that 'He hath given assurance to all men of this hope, in that he hath raised Jesus from the dead?'"

SECTION CXII.

CHAP. XXVI. 9—18. *I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. Which thing I also did in Jerusalem: and many of the saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them. And I punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme; and, being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities. Whereupon, as I went to Damascus with authority and commission from the chief priests, at mid-day, O King, I saw in the way a light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun, shining round about me and them which journeyed with me. And when we were all fallen to the earth, I heard a voice speaking unto me, and saying in the Hebrew tongue, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks. And I said, Who art thou, Lord? And he said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest. But rise, and stand upon thy feet; for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee: delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles unto whom now I send thee, to open their eyes and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me.*

THERE must have been a strangely blended feeling in Paul's mind as he recalled those sad days of his ignorance, when the name of Jesus

was hateful to him—a deep feeling of humiliation and remorse mingled with overpowering gratitude and love. The thought was never long out of his mind; he continually refers to it, he brings it forward at every opportunity in order to magnify the grace of God, and is content to lie low in the very dust before his fellow-men, that they might glorify God for that pattern of long-suffering and patience, which the Lord Jesus Christ had shown forth in him to them which should hereafter believe.

I do not think, however, that we have anywhere so melancholy a statement of the extreme lengths to which Paul in his unconverted state was permitted to go, as what he tells Agrippa here; and though he says to Timothy afterwards, that he obtained mercy because he did it ignorantly and in his time of unbelief; yet with what bitterness of spirit must he have mourned over that hardness of heart and unbelief, which could lead him into such acts of enmity and hatred against that name of Jesus, which was now so unspeakably dear and precious to him!

I do not think that sinners sufficiently realize or are aware, that though, indeed, and beyond all expression, blessed is the man whose unrighteousnesses are forgiven, and whose sin is covered, yet there never is, there never can be, an utter oblivion of that season when in their ignorance and unbelief they sinned against God, and that

there are ever-recurring periods when from the very depths of a broken and a contrite heart there is sobbed forth the saddened cry, "Oh, remember not the sins of my youth!" It in no degree militates against the fulness and freeness of that forgiveness which is in Christ Jesus, that the recollection even of forgiven sin is at times very burdensome, and the very sense of the love that could forgive so much adds a thousandfold to the self-reproach which still lingers in the heart even of the pardoned sinner. I believe it to be a gracious work of the Holy Spirit, that we may go humbly as well as "softly all our years;" and though repentance and sorrow for sin will have no place in that home where God himself shall wipe away all tears from our eyes, yet even there—how intensely and with what thrilling gratitude and love will the memory of those past transgressions bid the song of heaven re-echo to the praise of Him "who loved us and *washed us from our sins* in his own blood!"

The statement of the Apostle in these first verses adds a melancholy fact to the history of the early persecution of the Church of Christ. In Luke's narrative we have only the death of Stephen mentioned, and though it is said that Saul made havoc of the Church, yet one reads it as if it simply meant by committing men and women to prison. But Paul himself now tells us that this imprisonment in many a case led to

death; and what is still more sad, so furious and raging was the persecution, that some weak and timid ones were compelled by threats to blaspheme the Saviour's name; and that in all this imprisonment, torture, death, and blasphemy Paul himself was the active and untiring agent.*

The force of the argument, therefore, in this statement of Paul's is irresistible,—"If in times past I so madly persecuted the Church of Christ, to which every Jew can testify; if I so hated that name of Christ that I compelled others to blaspheme it also, what has been the all-powerful motive to induce me to forego all the principles and practice of so many years, and to cast in my lot among that very company whom I so despised and persecuted? It could be no self-interest, it could be no slight nor trifling impulse thus to change the whole current and colour of a life."

It is then that Paul proceeds to recount the wondrous cause that changed him from a per-

* I do not know whether we are justified in inferring from Paul's words, "I gave my vote against them"—κατήνεγκα ψῆφον—that he was a member of the Sanhedrim. If he was, it opens out a very wide field and range of inquiry, for we read that no man who was not a father was permitted to give a vote in criminal or capital cases, inasmuch as a father's heart would more incline to mercy; and if, therefore, Paul gave his vote for the putting to death those accused before the Sanhedrim, he must have been a father and a married man,—"Have we not power to lead about a sister, a wife, as well as other Apostles?"

secutor and blasphemer into a preacher of that faith which he once endeavoured to destroy. Scarcely more than two years had passed since Paul had made the same statement on the stair's-head of the Castle Antonia; and had there been a single statement that ingenuity could cavil at or malignity pervert, there were those present that day in Jerusalem who assuredly had the will, if they had had but the power; but not one word was ever questioned, not one statement ever gainsayed. And now in this august and solemn assembly, before kings and rulers, Paul reiterates the story of the wondrous scene at Damascus: how the Lord Jesus met him by the way, and revealed Himself unto him; and how, through the transforming power of the grace of God, the Æthiopian had changed his skin and the leopard his spots. It is the third time that this story is repeated, and at full length too, in the brief compass of this one little book; and I think there is much significance in this triple reiteration, that the miraculous conversion of St. Paul may stand as it were on such a lofty pedestal of evidence, far out of the reach of the puny dashing of the waves of infidelity or scorn.

SECTION CXIII.

CHAP. XXVI. 19—32. *Whereupon, O king Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision, but shewed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judæa, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance. For these causes the Jews caught me in the temple, and went about to kill me. Having therefore obtained help of God, I continue unto this day, witnessing both to small and great, saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come: that Christ should suffer, and that he should be the first that should rise from the dead, and should shew light unto the people, and to the Gentiles. And as he thus spake for himself, Festus said with a loud voice, Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad. But he said, I am not mad, most noble Festus; but speak forth the words of truth and soberness. For the king knoweth of these things, before whom also I speak freely: for I am persuaded that none of these things are hidden from him; for this thing was not done in a corner. King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets? I know that thou believest. Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian. And Paul said, I would to God, that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost, and altogether such as I am, except these bonds. And when he had thus spoken, the king rose up, and the governor, and Bernice, and they that sat with them: and when they were gone aside, they talked between themselves, saying, This man doeth nothing worthy of death or of bonds. Then said Agrippa unto Festus, This man might have been set at liberty, if he had not appealed unto Cæsar.*

"WHEREUPON, O King Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision." We find abundant evidence of the truth of Paul's declaration, in every step we have traversed side by side with him, in the city, in the wilderness, in the sea, in his often journeyings, in his unnumbered perils—amid weariness and painfulness, in the midnight dungeon, or in danger of being torn in pieces by the infuriated assembly at Jerusalem—in each and all we read the inscription, "fidelity and obedience." Oh, that at the close of life's weary pilgrimage, every soldier and servant of the cross may have the same testimony of his conscience, that he too has not been disobedient to the heavenly word! Oh, that we, who are now verifying the truth of the Apostle's statement as regarded himself, may equally have "our rejoicing in this, the testimony of our conscience, that in all simplicity and godly sincerity we too have had our conversation in the world," with all fidelity and holy obedience.

You may say, we have no heavenly vision to guide and direct us—we hear no voice out of heaven speaking unto us—we have no heaven-sent messenger coming in to us and telling us what we should do. It is quite true; nor had the majority of the Apostles been privileged to ascend with Jesus into the holy mount, and there behold Him transfigured before them, or hear that proclama-

tion from God the Father, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." But though no vision nor heavenly voice be sent to us, "we have a more sure word of prophecy"—we have "Moses and the Prophets," the Gospels, as well as Paul's own writings—we have line upon line, and precept upon precept, God's ministers and God's messengers coming in to us, and saying, "This is the way, walk ye in it." And happy, thrice happy for us, if we too can say that we have not been disobedient to the "heavenly message," and like Paul also can add at the close of all, "I have finished my course, I have kept the faith."

The same help that was vouchsafed to Paul is ready for each, nor is there a pilgrim upon earth that has not need to take up Paul's thankful acknowledgment and say, "having received help of God I continue unto this day." And though many a time Paul's life had been in danger, though plot and conspiracy had been framed against his life, yet through the help and grace of God he had continued unharmed unto that very hour, when he was now witnessing alike to small and great those precious truths and promises which Moses and the prophets had testified before, how that Christ should suffer, and should be the first-fruits of that glorious Resurrection-day, which was to dawn on Jew and Gentile.

It was the very same doctrine of a resurrection from the dead, which Paul had preached at Athens, and which had proved so sad a stumbling-block to the sceptic philosophers there. A future state of being after death was no novel doctrine in the creeds of heathenism; they, too, had their Elysian fields and their Tartarus; they deified their heroes and made demigods of their kings and conquerors; but they never dreamed, they could not conceive, that those bodies, which slept in the dust, should awake again and be reunited to the spirit; they utterly disbelieved that those corporeal frames, which had been dissolved into nothing, and had again mingled and been absorbed in their original elements, should be re-gathered and collected together, bone to bone, and body to body, and the breath of God once more breathe upon these slain, and they should live—that the voice of Jesus and the trumpet of the Archangel should resound through every grave and through every ocean, and the earth and the sea give up their dead. This was beyond their conception and belief; and as such, the wise men in Athens mocked at it, and Festus here upon his judgment-seat pronounced it mere book-learning, the reveries of a disordered imagination, if not the ravings of actual madness. How calm, how dignified, how full of respectful courtesy yet gentle rebuke is the answer to the somewhat rude interruption of the judge, "I am not mad,

most noble Festus, but speak forth the words of soberness and truth." *

If at the beginning there had been any semblance of incredulity on Agrippa's countenance, it would seem to have long since subsided into earnest and absorbed attention as the Apostle proceeded; every thought and feeling seem to have been hushed into the intensest interest as he listened, and he heeded not, or hardly noticed, the interruption of Festus at his side. And how must attention have deepened, and the very breathing almost as it were suspended, as Paul, with wonderful art and most consummate skill, called him as it were into court to give his testimony—bade Agrippa himself stand up as a witness of the faith in Christ, "None of these things are hidden from him; they were not done in a corner, but in the full blaze of noon-day. King Agrippa, stand forth and testify. Believest thou the Prophets—the Prophets of thine own Scriptures?"

* The charge has been again revived in these our philosophical and rationalistic days; and it is sad to think that a writer such as Emerson has pandered to the vitiated taste of the age by such a "conglomeration" as the following:—"A certain tendency to insanity has always attended the opening of the religious sense in man, as if blinded with excess of light. The *trances* of Socrates, the *union* of Plotinus, the *vision* of Porphyry, the *conversion* of Paul, the *convulsions* of George Fox, and the *illumination* of Swedenborg are all of this kind."

It was a striking confession of the truth that was almost unconsciously wrested from the reluctant lips of the monarch; and yet painful evidence does it give of one, of whom at the moment one might almost have said in the words of Jesus, "Thou art not far from the kingdom of God," yet, like another on whom Jesus looked lovingly, he went away because he had not the heart nor the courage to surrender all, take up his cross, and follow Christ. *

SECTION CXIV.

CHAP. XXVII. 1—2. *And when it was determined that we should sail into Italy, they delivered Paul and certain other prisoners unto one named Julius, a centurion of Augustus' band. And entering into a ship of Adramyttium, we launched, meaning to sail by the coasts of Asia; one Aristarchus, a Macedonian of Thessalonica, being with us.*

THE Lord's time that his servant should go to

* I must with all deference express my dissent *toto cœlo* with Mr. Howson and some other commentators in the view they take of Agrippa's reply, that it was altogether in a spirit of irony and mockery, as if it ran thus, "Why at this rate you will soon persuade me too to be a Christian." I agree with Mr. H. that ἐν ὀλίγῳ is incorrectly rendered "almost," and that its legitimate ellipsis is ἐν ὀλίγῳ χρονῷ; but I do not see that this necessarily makes the difference he contends for in the sense, or rather the spirit of the King's remark.

Rome was now come; and no Felix, no Jewish Sanhedrim, no band of conspirators, no Tertullus, can any longer stay His purposes. In all that they had done hitherto, they were as much fulfilling His will, as the winds and the waves obeyed His word that for a time seemed to thwart it. As one reads the narrative in this chapter of the many hindrances and obstacles that beset and delayed the Apostle at almost every step, one is almost prepared, or at least one would not be surprised, to hear him exclaiming in the language of the patriarch, "All these things are against me." And, indeed, one is continually reminded of the way by which the Lord sent Joseph into Egypt to fulfil his mission there. Now he too went down as a captive and in bonds, and was detained in prison "until the time that His word came, the word of the Lord tried him." But "be of good cheer, Paul, as thou hast testified of me at Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome;" and so, with the Lord's promise on which to lean, though a prisoner and in bonds, though all things outwardly were against him, he cheerfully commits himself to the stormy winds and waves, and to Him that ruleth over them, in the full assurance that in His own time he would bring him into his desired haven. And how often is the same realized to the experience of many and many a child of God, that those very things, which in his blindness he looked upon only as

occasions of stumbling and hindrances by the way were in reality stepping-stones purposely placed in his path by the Lord to aid him on his course.

There is no portion of Paul's history as recorded by Luke which has received more attentive consideration and searching investigation than the present narrative of this voyage and shipwreck on his way from Cesarea to Rome. It is so accurately detailed, with such minute attention even to the simplest circumstance, that one almost feels as if, amid the general loss and wreck of all that was on board, the captain's log-book, if we may so speak, had escaped the common fate, and had been providentially preserved to afford us a clue even to the minutest particulars of this most interesting portion of the Apostle's sufferings.

But we have what is perhaps far better than the dry, technical detail of an officer's log; we have the accurate remembrance, the graphic sketch, the picturesque, life-like painting of one, who with his own eyes witnessed every scene, was present in every incident, and heard every expression of dismay and despondency, or of cheerfulness, and confidence, and hope, as they fell from the lips of those on board. Many a sailor has since traversed the ocean-tracks of this voyage of the Apostle; not a few have gone for the express purpose of testing the writer's accuracy and truthfulness, though in no unkindly spirit; and I think we may truly say that no narrative has ever come

forth from the ordeal of such a searching inquiry, no one has ever been subjected to such a process of investigation, of line by line, and step by step, and sounding by sounding, and yet in no one particular, even to the shifting of a wind's point, or the drifting of an ocean-current, has any variation from the strictest accuracy been discovered. And it is a singular coincidence that the most recent discovery, even so late as in the last year, has given a certainty to the solitary point on which geographers had thrown a doubt; and the discovery of the ruins of the city of Lasea in the year 1856 has set at rest the supposition that the name of Lasea had been inserted by mistake for another city of the name of Thalassa.*

It will not be necessary for us in these domestic expositions to enter into the naval details of this voyage, further than as they illustrate the

* In a recent "Edinburgh Review," No. 211, the reviewer states that Lasea is a place totally unknown to geographers, and that the coins of a city called Thalassa are not unfrequently met with in that very district, where the Fair Havens still preserve their name, and that, from the style and character of these coins, it is proved that Thalassa was a flourishing city in the time of St. Paul. In the second edition, however, of Mr. Smith, of Jordanhill's *Voyage and Shipwreck of St. Paul*, the discovery of the ruins of Lasea has been made on the south coast of Crete, the modern Candia. The discovery was made during a yacht cruise in the month of January, 1856, by Hugh Tennent, Esq., of Wellpark, Glasgow, and the Rev. George Brown, of the Free Church of Scotland.

character of Paul, or evidence the conspicuous guidance and hand of God in every portion of his way, whether on board the shattered and foundering vessel, or in that miraculous preservation not only of his own life, but of every individual in the ship, according to the Lord's own gracious declaration and promise to the Apostle in the hour of extreme danger.

The first circumstance that strikes our notice is in the very first verse, viz., the recurrence of that little personal pronoun "we"—"when it was determined that *we* should sail into Italy"—so then Luke was again the faithful companion of his way. It is a touching coincidence of the fidelity and attachment of that friend and associate of so many years and so many sufferings, that in his second imprisonment at Rome, as well as now in this his first, Luke was still by his side; "Only Luke is with me," is the touching notice of the Apostle's gratitude. It was not so, however, in this instance, for Aristarchus of Thessalonica was with him also. Paul in his epistle to the Colossians calls Aristarchus "my fellow prisoner," and in that to Philemon "my fellow labourer," as well as Luke: probably he means only the latter character, and that he calls him his "fellow prisoner," inasmuch as he voluntarily submitted to share the reproach and hardships of the Apostle's imprisonment.

During the whole period of Paul's detention at Cesarea and his previous persecution at Jerusalem, none of his associates are named, though we can hardly doubt that they were nigh at hand to administer to his comfort, and cheer his solitude, as well as act as occasional agents and emissaries to the various churches he had planted. But one seems to recognize the Lord's especial love and careful provision for his servant in thus supplying at the moment of need the very solace he would most desire in these faithful and attached attendants. "As thy day, so thy strength," is the Lord's promise, never forgotten, never unfulfilled to any child in his family.

SECTION CXV.

CHAP. XXVII. 3—8. *And the next day we touched at Sidon. And Julius courteously entreated Paul, and gave him liberty to go unto his friends to refresh himself. And when we had launched from thence, we sailed unto Cyprus because the winds were contrary. And when we had sailed over the sea of Cilicia and Pamphylia, we came to Myra, a city of Lycia. And there the centurion found a ship of Alexandria sailing into Italy; and he put us therein. And when we had sailed slowly many days, and scarce were come over against Cnidus, the wind not suffering us, we sailed under Crete, over against Salmone:*

and hardly passing it, came unto a place which is called The Fair Havens, nigh whereunto was the city of Lasea.

We have already had in these acts of the Apostles a Roman centurion of the noble Cornelian race; we now meet with another of the no less honourable lineage of the Julian family; and of him too is recorded much that is kind and courteous, and that too towards one to whom men in general are not wont to show courtesy or kindness—to a prisoner in bonds. This treatment, which Paul received at the hands of Julius, is, I think, another evidence of the power which the Apostle had of winning the regards and affections of those with whom he came in contact. It may be that Julius had received from Festus injunctions to treat Paul with no harshness, and to lay upon him no greater restraint than was consistent with his safe keeping and delivery at Rome; but a churlish man, far out of the reach and hearing of his superior, would have little regarded such orders had they been at variance with his own feelings. Julius, however, was no churlish man, and evidently took pleasure in granting Paul such freedom and indulgence as was not permitted to the other prisoners, of whom we read there were some on board.

I would just observe here that, whether in the narratives of the Gospel, or in this of the Acts of the Apostles, whenever a centurion of the

Roman army is mentioned, it is always in terms of commendation, and some trait or other in his character is recorded to his honour and advantage; and it does give one a high idea of that class of men, of whom we should not in that age have been so ready to predicate the then rare virtues of piety, humanity, and alms-giving, and, I would add, a liberality of feeling far beyond his age, in him who built a synagogue for Jewish worshippers.

To return, however, to Paul's voyage to Rome, it seems almost from the very first to have been unfavourable—contrary winds baffling them and delaying their more rapid progress; perhaps in these days of steam and rapid locomotion, almost defiant of wind and wave, one can hardly enter into the difficulties and impediments of navigation when no compass was known, and men chiefly steered their course by the heavenly bodies. One can only wonder at the daring and skill of men, who amid so much of obstacle yet attained so much, and who have left on record so many exploits both of naval tactics in battle, undaunted hardihood in commerce, as well as industry and science in geographical research.

The first portion of Paul's voyage appears to have been made in a small trader of Adramyttium, a seaport town of Mysia, which was on the point of leaving Cesarea at the time when Julius was anxious to embark for Rome; and, as the

season was hastening on when sailing would become hazardous, he determined to avail himself of it, as far as their mutual course lay together. The first place they touched at was Sidon, between sixty and seventy miles from Cesarea, and which they reached the day after they had set sail, the wind up to that point being favourable to them. I need not stop to tell you of Sidon in her ancient glory and renown; no city, save that of Damascus, is so early or so frequently named; and both Sidon and Damascus are imperishably linked with the Apostle's name—the latter with his errand of persecution and miraculous conversion, and now Sidon with the affectionate greeting of Christian friends, to whom Julius "gave him liberty to go to refresh himself," and who would recognize in this ambassador in bonds for Christ's sake another testimony to that truth which Paul himself had so earnestly inculcated throughout his first missionary journey, that "through much tribulation we must enter into the kingdom of heaven."

Paul's spirit refreshed by this interview with Christian brethren, and no doubt each and all having had realized to their own hearts the promise of the prophet to such as fear the Lord and speak one to another, and think upon his name—the vessel now resumed its course, and, after some hindrance from contrary winds, at length reached Myra, where an important and,

humanly speaking, we should perhaps say a disastrous change took place from the little trader in which they were to a larger and more commodious vessel in the harbour of Myra, a ship of Alexandria proceeding to Italy with a cargo of wheat. It was an opportunity of which one could hardly wonder that the centurion gladly availed himself; the Adramyttian vessel would have carried them only a short distance further, certainly not beyond Cnidus, whence she would have steered in a contrary direction homeward, and no vessel might be found there on their arrival. Julius, no doubt, congratulated himself on the lucky chance that had just timed his reaching Myra with the departure of this Alexandrian merchantman. And yet one knows not that it would have been different had the centurion decided otherwise. The Psalmist comforted himself with the knowledge, "The Lord is King, be the earth never so unquiet;" and so God's children may take the same comfort home to themselves, "The Lord reigneth—though the stormy wind ariseth and the waves be lifted up."

"When by the dreadful tempest borne
High on the broken wave,
They know Thou art not slow to hear
Nor impotent to save."

SECTION CXVI.

CHAP. XXVII. 9—19. *Now when much time was spent, and when sailing was now dangerous, because the fast was now already past, Paul admonished them, and said unto them, Sirs, I perceive that this voyage will be with hurt and much damage, not only of the lading and ship, but also of our lives. Nevertheless the centurion believed the master and the owner of the ship, more than those things which were spoken by Paul. And because the haven was not commodious to winter in, the more part advised to depart thence also, if by any means they might attain to Phenice, and there to winter; which is an haven of Crete, and lieth toward the south west and north west. And when the south wind blew softly, supposing that they had obtained their purpose, loosing thence, they sailed close by Crete. But not long after there arose against it a tempestuous wind, called Euroclydon. And when the ship was caught, and could not bear up into the wind, we let her drive. And running under a certain island which is called Clauda, we had much work to come by the boat: which when they had taken up, they used helps, undergirding the ship; and fearing lest they should fall into the quicksands, strake sail, and so were driven. And we being exceedingly tossed with a tempest, the next day they lightened the ship; and the third day we cast out with our own hands the tackling of the ship.*

FROM the time this Alexandrian ship left Myra, and before it reached Cnidus, their difficulties, if not their dangers, began. They had, however, though with much delay and much battling with adverse winds, reached the island of Crete, or modern Candia, and for a time were safely

anchored in a roadstead near the city of Lasea, to which I have already alluded, bearing, and still bearing, I believe, the name of "The Fair Havens"—something, perhaps, like our Cape of Good Hope, where so many storms and adverse gales meet our vessels. It is probable, as has been suggested, that the name was meant to be conciliatory; we know with what dread the ancients shrunk from any ill-omened expression, and with what superstitious tact they endeavoured to conciliate everything that might be thought adverse or malignant:* and therefore, though the harbour of "The Fair Havens" was incommodious and insecure, they perhaps thought to disarm it of its enmity by this complimentary appellation.

And yet probably at this season of the year, with autumnal winds impending, and a hazardous sea before them, it would have been safer to have remained where they were than run the risk, which did actually occur, of being driven out to sea in the attempt to beat up to Phœnice, another and more advantageous harbour on the opposite coast of the same island. Luke has recorded Paul's strong remonstrances against any attempt to leave their present position, and though one

* The name of the Eumenides, or "Kind Ladies," as applied to the Furies, will immediately occur to the classical reader, and on the same principle our Scottish neighbours call fairies "the Good Folk."

can hardly be surprised that it was not attended to, yet it most strikingly evidences the somewhat extraordinary estimation in which Paul must have been held, that, though a prisoner, he should be permitted to give an opinion as to the management and conduct of the ship. One does not, perhaps, associate the idea of much naval experience with Paul's career as a preacher of the Gospel, and yet we must remember that he had thrice suffered shipwreck, and on one of these occasions in such imminent peril that he had drifted for a whole night and day on the deep, clinging probably to, and supporting himself by somewhat of the same measures as were adopted on the present occasion, "on boards or broken pieces of the ship." We do not know where or when these shipwrecks had occurred to Paul; the present one in this voyage cannot assuredly be one of the three, for that letter to the Corinthians, in which he mentions them, was written previously, and the shipwrecks, of which he there writes, must have been antecedent also.

And may not this throw some light on Paul's stepping forward on the present occasion, and detailing his own experience, perhaps, in these very waters? It is true, his counsel was rejected; nor need we wonder at it: the captain and the owner of the vessel had larger ventures at stake than a prisoner; and all on board—crew and soldiers, and passengers and prisoners—no doubt

cared for their lives as much as Paul. The centurion, especially, would be anxious to reach Rome, as well as be divested of his charge, and add to all this the natural propensity of the human mind to underrate danger, when it would interfere with our interests or wishes, and I think we have a sufficient reason why Paul's solitary opinion was rejected, and that of the majority adopted. We, of course, know that his opinion was right, and that of the majority wrong; but the counsel of the Apostle was backed by no higher authority than his own judgment and experience, and, unhappily for the result, that of the rest was sanctioned by a favourable wind springing up at the very moment, of which they instantly took advantage, and set sail from the Fair Havens in hope of speedily reaching Phœnice.

Paul's shipwreck, as narrated by Luke, is familiar to most; and most graphically does the writer bring before us the varied incidents of those days and nights of peril and darkness,—the alternations of fear and hope, of despondency and strenuous effort. It is such a season of deepest trial, no doubt, which in some few, perhaps, brings out all the baser instincts of our nature, but which are abundantly redeemed by the noblest exhibitions of courage, self-devotion, and denial, generosity, endurance, tenderness and piety in others, that have ever adorned and dignified human nature in its hours of sternest conflict and trial.

In this narrative Paul's character stands out in bold relief from that of the rest on board—calm and confident, fully persuaded of the eventual loss of the ship, though assured by God that the lives of all should be spared, and yet himself taking as active and energetic measures for the general welfare as if his own labours and exertions were to supply every need. It is a touching incident, recorded in the 19th verse, how Paul aided in that moment of danger with his own hands in lightening the ship, and throwing overboard its cumbrous tackling. Those hands had often been lifted up in prayer for others—often had they been stretched out in earnest entreaty, and to command attention from those to whom he was speaking the words of life—many a weary day and through many a weary hour of night had those hands been engaged in ministering to his own necessities, and to those that were with him; and now those hands were as busy and ready, in the hour of danger, amid the howling of the winds, and the roar of the waves, and the noise and tumult of those on board; and yet his own spirit as calm and collected as it was in the yet more fearful peril on the stair's-head of the Castle of Antonia.

SECTION CXVII.

CHAP. XXVII. 20—26. *And when neither sun nor stars in many days appeared, and no small tempest lay on us, all hope that we should be saved was then taken away. But after long abstinence Paul stood forth in the midst of them, and said, Sirs, ye should have hearkened unto me, and not have loosed from Crete, and to have gained this harm and loss. And now I exhort you to be of good cheer: for there shall be no loss of any man's life among you, but of the ship. For there stood by me this night the angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve, saying, Fear not, Paul: thou must be brought before Cæsar: and, lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee. Wherefore, Sirs, be of good cheer; for I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me. Howbeit we must be cast upon a certain island.*

ONE hardly in these days realizes the actual perils and difficulties which must have beset a ship at sea in a storm before the discovery of the compass, and when the sun and the stars in the heavens formed their chief guides over the trackless deep. And yet, when one reads in this portion of our chapter that "neither sun nor stars had for many days appeared," when all indications of their course whether by night or by day had been altogether obliterated, and they were driven by the storm whithersoever it pleased, one can in some degree realize the perplexity in which these tempest-tossed mariners must have been.

In such emergencies, as far as human confidence

is felt, all eyes are turned to the commander of the vessel: if he preserve a bold and undaunted aspect, if his eye quail not, and his voice is still cheerful and commanding, and his look animated and confident, then the rest keep up their spirits, or at least lose not altogether their hopes. And yet, in this time of danger, neither captain nor owner, though so bold and confident and disdainful of Paul's warning at the outset, is ever mentioned as speaking a word of confidence, or issuing a command: neither Julius, nor his soldiers, nor any of the crew are prominently brought forward as doing aught to provide for the general safety in this hour of common danger. Of all the 276 souls on board this ill-fated vessel, one alone is named—one alone steps forward to bid the timid take courage, and revive the hopes of the despondING; and who, not shrinking for a moment from those bodily exertions which their position of peril rendered so imperatively urgent, yet still from time to time spoke words of comfort and confidence to all, as he laboured among them. And who was this? Even the poor prisoner in bonds; and one cannot but recognise and acknowledge the singular honour which the Lord thus put upon His servant in thus making him the authorized agent and messenger of mercy to those among whom he was in appearance only as a prisoner on his way to trial. He had forewarned them of the peril; and, now that the event had

proved his judgment true, he again assures them of the ultimate safety of every life on board. But how different the grounds on which he now rests his confidence! Then it was apparently his own experience and judgment; he mentioned no revelation from heaven, no commission to speak with authority, and apparently he had none. God, if we may so speak, is never profuse in His miracles; He never vouchsafes an unneeded vision; and, where ordinary means suffice, no extraordinary ones will be supplied.

But Paul's position was one of much despondency and anxiety; he was indeed going to Rome, as he had long and earnestly desired—but how was he going?—as a prisoner, as one who had apparently appealed from the injustice and wrong of his own countrymen to the tribunal of a heathen magistrate: and how would he be received when he reached the city—how testify of Jesus there in imprisonment and bonds? The storm that had overtaken him was an illustration of his own stormy life—he might almost take up the words of the Psalmist and say, "All thy waves and thy billows are gone over me;" or, there might have come a moment of weakness over him, as over the prophet of old, when he sat down under the juniper tree, and requested for himself that he might die, and said, "It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life, for I am not better than my fathers." But as to the

prophet in his despondency was sent an angel to strengthen and give him meat, so an angel of God was equally and especially sent from heaven on a similar mission of encouragement to Paul, assuring him that, though in this imminent peril, he should yet reach Rome in safety and stand before Cæsar: and as a pledge and assurance of God's word, the lives of all that were in that ship should be given *unto him.* Oh! what honour on this his servant! the lives of all—of Julius and his soldiers—of the seamen and the passengers—all that sailed with him given of God to his servant Paul!

We have a narrative of another shipwreck, probably in the same sea, recorded in the Bible, and that too of a servant of God,—but under what different circumstances! he was fleeing from his master's service: and when in their extremity the crew of that vessel "cast out the wares that were in the ship into the sea to lighten it," Jonah was gone down into the sides of the ship and was fast asleep! heedless of his own danger or of those that were with him. I know not whether any in Paul's ship, save Luke and Aristarchus, gave much credit to his assurances of safety, but one cannot but recognize, not simply the calm courage—others might have felt as fearless of death as he—but the unwavering, unshaken faith, with which in the midst of this fearful storm, when, as it is expressly said, "all hope

that we should be saved was taken away," Paul quietly stood up to tell them of One mighty to save, whose he was and whom he served, who had given to him all their lives: and then so trustfully added, "Sirs, be of good cheer, for I believe God that it shall be even as it was told me." I think it is Sedgewick on the 23d Psalm* who somewhere sweetly says, "The little child is quiet, though upon the seas, when its mother holds it in her arms; why then is the Christian no more settled who hath God with him, still holding him up by the right hand of his power?"

SECTION CXVIII.

CHAP. XXVII. 27—32. *But when the fourteenth night was come, as we were driven up and down in Adria, about midnight the shipmen deemed that they drew near to some country; and sounded, and found it twenty fathoms: and when they had gone a little further, they sounded again, and found it fifteen fathoms. Then fearing lest we should have fallen upon rocks, they cast four anchors out of the stern, and wished for the day. And as the shipmen were about to flee out of the ship, when they had let down the boat into the sea, under colour as though they would have cast anchors out of the foreship, Paul said to the centurion and to the soldiers, Except these abide in the ship, ye cannot be saved. Then the soldiers cut off the ropes of the boat, and let her fall off.*

* 1658.

For fourteen days and nights was this hapless vessel tossed upon the stormy waves, or as Luke expresses it, "was driven up and down in Adria," or that portion of the Mediterranean between Crete and Sicily. We may picture to oneself how in those days of darkness and peril, and the bustle and confusion on board, the tossing and straining of the ship, and the employment of the various means which naval experience would suggest for the prevention of those results, which, in such continued tempest, there was but too much reason to fear, every man's time and thoughts would be abundantly occupied, as we find it was, even to the setting aside of the necessary and regular meals. And yet amidst it all, one remembers Paul in the dungeon at Philippi with his companion Silas, praying and singing praises to God even at midnight: and one has read how another man of God, in more modern times, when the storms of persecution were raging violently against him, used to calm his own spirit and the apprehensions of those around him by saying, "Come, let us sing the 46th Psalm." So I sometimes love to think that amid the roar of the elements, the howling of the wind, and the noise of the waves, and the straining of the ship, and the issuing of orders and counter-orders, and tumult of those on board, the voice of Paul and his companions, Luke and Aristarchus, might be at times heard above the din, singing

the same noble strains, which afterwards so calmed Luther's spirit.

"God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore will we not fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof."

On the fourteenth night indications presented themselves that they were drifting near to land, and the usual precautions of heaving the lead and sounding being taken, the supposition proved correct; but as to be driven on shore in the darkness, amid breakers or sunken rocks, would be perilous in the extreme, they sought to stay the ship's course, if possible, till day-break, by casting out four anchors from the stern. It is a singular confirmation of the minute accuracy of Luke's narrative, that to this day in the modern Greek vessels used in the Levant trade in these same waters, anchors are still cast out of the stern, contrary to the practice of almost every other vessel of every other nation.

I said, a section or two ago, that these and similar seasons of danger and trial bring out some of the baser instincts of man's nature; while, thank God, they elicit also some of the noblest trials of heroism and disinterested love of our kind. I have no doubt that many a ship-

wreck, besides this recorded here, has witnessed many exhibitions of both; as I have in times of infectious disease and spreading fever on land, seen many instances of much devotedness of feeling, and also much abandonment of duty and affection. We have a melancholy outbreak of the latter in the present instance in the selfish attempt of the crew to seize upon the boat and make their escape alone. It is evident *they* did not believe the Apostle's words, and, of course, not believing them, their purpose was dastardly and cruel in the extreme, in leaving the vessel without its regular hands, and also in carrying away for their own rescue the only apparently available means of escape for all, and that, too, under the pretence of more zealously providing for the general safety.

It has been said that Paul's address to the centurion, "Except these abide in the ship, ye cannot be saved," is at variance with his previous unqualified assertion, that "God had given him the lives of all that sailed with him," and his declaration that "he believed God that it should be even as it was told him." The Lord's promises are always conditional—conditions are ever implied, though not ever expressed. "Dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed,"—there the promise and the condition are both expressed—here, it is evidently implied, but not expressed.

You may, of course, ask, "Is the Lord's arm shortened that He cannot save without human agency and skill?" Assuredly He can; nor do I think that the Apostle meant so much to imply that their agency or skill was essential to the safety of the vessel, as that their unbelief of God's Word and distrust of his power was offensive to Him, and would bring down a curse and not a blessing.

No doubt, however, the Lord does work by human means; in Israel's case at the Red Sea, their commanded duty was to "stand still and see the salvation of God," in the present, they were to work out their own salvation, and that because God had promised a blessing on the means. It is the same in the Christian's spiritual life,—"It is God that worketh in you, therefore work ye.' "The sword of Joshua," says one,* "must go with the prayers of Moses, and the prayers of Moses accompany the sword of Joshua. Had they fought and not prayed, they would have obtained no victory, because God will not be neglected: had they prayed and not fought, they would have obtained no victory, because God will not be tempted."

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* Secker's "Nonsuch Professor."

SECTION CXIX.

CHAP. XXVII. 33—38. *And while the day was coming on, Paul besought them all to take meat, saying, This day is the fourteenth day that ye have tarried, and continued fasting, having taken nothing. Wherefore I pray you to take some meat; for this is for your health: for there shall not an hair fall from the head of any of you. And when he had thus spoken, he took bread and gave thanks to God in presence of them all; and when he had broken it, he began to eat. Then were they all of good cheer, and they also took some meat. And we were in all in the ship two hundred threescore and sixteen souls. And when they had eaten enough, they lightened the ship, and cast out the wheat into the sea.*

"Watchman! what of the night? Watchman! what of the night?
The watchman said, 'The morning cometh.'"

How often must words like these and inquiries such as these have broken upon the ears of the anxious watchers on board that sinking vessel during the dark and melancholy hours of the night. David, in one of his Psalms, to express the earnest longing of his soul after God, describes the feeling as more intense than that of some watcher watching for the first streak of light, the first gleam of day-break in the horizon, "My soul longeth for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning."

And yet one can hardly realize the straining of

the eyeballs, with which those anxious men would strive to gaze through the clouds and darkness to catch one glimpse of that shore towards which they had been driven, and with what a thankful heart, with what a piercing cry of joy would there sound forth from every lip, "The morning cometh." It is, perhaps, difficult for those who have not gone through the horrors of such a night, when in every howl of the wind and every roar of the waves death seemed to be clamorous and greedy for its prey, to imagine the scene of disquiet and agitation on board during that live-long night, with two hundred and seventy and six souls clustered on her deck and about her rigging watching for that morning light which might bring safety, but might only realize destruction. And yet amid those "two hundred threescore and sixteen souls" there stood one calm and undismayed, and whose language, even while the storm raged so furiously, and no hope of being saved, beyond his own words, appeared, assured them that not one hair of the head of any of them should come to harm.

A Roman poet, almost a contemporary of the Apostle, has sketched an imaginary character of a fearless and undaunted man, of him who is just and firm in his resolve; and it is singular that the stormy Adriatic is one of the scenes in which he places his supposed character, and he says that "no look of threatening tyrant, no blast of

southern wind, that stormy ruler of the restless Adriatic, nor the mighty hand of Jove wielding his thunder-bolts, could shake or daunt such an one, and even if the shattered heavens should fall upon him, they would fall on one devoid of fear." It is undoubtedly a noble stanza; * but how far beyond, how immeasurably superior the Christian hero in his hour of trial and of peril; in the one case, like a second Prometheus, defying the mighty hands of Jove wielding his thunder-bolts—in the other testifying of his assured confidence and trust, because God had promised safety, and he believed God that it should be even as it was told him. We can easily believe, too, how such a being as the one the poet has sketched, though he might extort admiration from the surrounding crowd, yet if they were in the same peril with himself, how he would fail in communicating his own resolute and daring spirit to them, and as he would be above, and beyond their sympathy, so they would be beneath his. And yet how different the scene on

* Justum ac tenacem propositi virum
Non civium ardor prava jubentium,
Non vultus instantis tyranni
Mente qualet solida, neque Auster,
Dux inquieti turbidus Hadriæ,
Nec fulminantis magna manus Jovis.
Si fractus illabatur orbis,
Impavidum ferient ruinæ.
—*Hor. Od. lib. iii., Car. iii., l.* 1—8.

this night of gloom and storm! Though to human appearance Paul was of least account of all that were on board that ship, holding no command, employed in no capacity, himself in custody to take his trial for offences charged against him; yet it is this man, this prisoner in bonds, who in the hour of danger stands prominently forward to cheer and encourage the rest, setting them an example, in his own quiet demeanour and serene piety, of that trust in God which no hurricane of the elements nor the far fiercer rage of men could ever weaken or diminish.

And I cannot but think that this simple meal, as the day dawned on them after that night of anxiety and fear, taken probably as it was standing, and like the Israelites' first passover in Egypt, "with their loins girded, their shoes on their feet, and their staff in their hand, eaten in haste"—the Apostle standing at their head, and in the presence of these idolatrous and heathen soldiers and seamen, taking the bread, and giving God thanks in the presence of them all, and himself setting the example of cheerful participation in the food thus blessed—is one of the most interesting scenes, with all its adjuncts within and without the vessel, which an inspired writer has ever penned.

"Skin for skin—yea, all that a man hath will he give for his life," said Satan of Job; and no

doubt it is true of many and many a one, especially when death stares in the face. This crew had already lightened the ship, they had cast out the very tackling and gear of the vessel, they had undergirded or lashed the ship together to prevent its planks starting, and had used every precaution the love of life could suggest. But its owner had still clung to his cargo, he would run any risk, emperil even any lives, if he could save his wheat; but now—what would it profit him, if all Africa had emptied her storehouses to fill his barns? Death laughs at avarice, and stands mocking by, while the miser would clutch his gold even as he sinks beneath the waves. However, all that a man hath will he give for his life; and so as the last effort and hope of deliverance, even the wheat was cast out into the sea, like that Grecian traveller,* who bade his servants empty their gold bags on the Libyan sands, because their carriage hindered and delayed his progress.

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* Græcus Aristippus, qui servos projicere aurum
In mediâ jussit Libyâ, quia tardius irent
Propter onus segnes.
—*Hor. Sat. lib. ii., l.* 100.

SECTION CXX.

CHAP. XXVII. 39—44. *And when it was day, they knew not the land: but they discovered a certain creek with a shore into the which they were minded, if it were possible, to thrust in the ship. And when they had taken up the anchors, they committed themselves unto the sea, and loosed the rudder-bands, and hoised up the main-sail to the wind and made toward shore. And falling into a place where two seas met, they ran the ship aground; and the fore-part stuck fast, and remained unmoveable, but the hinder-part was broken with the violence of the waves. And the soldiers' counsel was to kill the prisoners, lest any of them should swim out and escape. But the centurion, willing to save Paul, kept them from their purpose, and commanded that they which could swim should cast themselves first into the sea, and get to land: and the rest, some on boards, and some on broken pieces of the ship. And so it came to pass, that they escaped all safe to land.*

DAY at length broke upon these tempest-tossed mariners, but it brought little hope or encouragement, and to all appearance, no safety. At first, indeed, they thought they had discovered means of running the ship into a narrow creek, so as to permit them to get on shore without risk or difficulty; but the strong current of two contrary seas drove them on a bank, where the ship stuck fast, and soon went to pieces by the violent dashing of the waves.

It was in this emergency that the cruel purpose was entertained by the soldiers of putting their

prisoners to death lest they should escape. There is something so repulsive in the proposal, so utterly repugnant to what we might have imagined to have been their feelings at such a moment towards one at least of those prisoners, that one has some difficulty to account for it. Of course the proposition included Paul's being put to death as well as the rest—there is no exception made in his favour, and indeed the motive ascribed to Julius for resisting the suggestion implies as much. Paul's influence on board had been a most salutary one; only that very morning, scarcely more than an hour or two before, he had spoken words of cheerfulness and encouragement to all, had assured them that not a hair of their head should perish, had bidden them recruit their exhausted strength by taking food, and himself had set the example; and it is expressly added, "then were they all of good cheer." At this moment, then, we must suppose Paul to have stood high in their estimation, and that they looked on him as some heaven-sent guardian, being sent to save them from destruction; and yet almost the very next thing we read is, "the soldiers' counsel was to kill the prisoners," and Paul among them.

It is really difficult to account for this sudden change and revulsion of feeling; it could hardly be from a sense of stern and rigid duty, no feeling of responsibility as to the safety of the

prisoners suggested the counsel, for the very circumstances of the case precluded all blame, and on Julius probably rested the whole responsibility. Nor do I think that we can refer it in any measure to those base and selfish instincts of our nature to which I have already alluded as brought out into prominence in such seasons of danger; such an instinct might have left the prisoners to perish unheeded and uncared for amid the breakers and the rocks, but it would not have wasted a thought nor a moment of time on any other plan of more speedy riddance of the charge.

It may be, however, that we may find a motive for this sudden change and revulsion of feeling in the disappointment they felt in the utter destruction and breaking up of the ship. I do not, indeed, suppose that any on board expected, like Naaman the Syrian, that the Apostle would stand forth on the deck and spread out his hands towards the sea, and bid the winds cease and the waves be still. But when they saw that narrow cove or bay so opportunely presenting, as they thought, the means of safety, and instantly cut off the anchors and let them fall, and loosed the rudder bands, and hoisted a sail to carry them at once to the point—at this moment and in this way I can well believe that they fancied they saw the very means of deliverance held out by Paul as the way of escape. But when, through the

strong current of the opposing "seas," the vessel missed its aim, and, bow foremost, ran aground and stuck fast, while the hinder part was broken to pieces by the furious dashing of the waves, we may perhaps understand how, in that moment of disappointed hopes—death apparently rushing in upon them with every wave, and threatening to engulph them—their rage was instantly excited against Paul especially, and they would have killed all the prisoners rather than that he should escape.

But not a hair of *their* head—not a hair of *his* should perish—"Be of good cheer, Paul," "thou shalt yet see Rome, and lo! God hath given thee all them that sail with thee." And so it came to pass, as God had said, and as Paul believed—some by swimming, some on boards and floating spars, and some on broken pieces of the ship, they escaped all safe to land.

Paul's shipwreck has been often compared to life's voyage; but, alas! there is a wide and heart-rending difference, a gulf as wide as that which separated Lazarus from Dives; and among the many that drift among the breakers, or are dashed upon the rocks, far, very far from *all*, get safe to land. In that hour of shipwreck, indeed, when everything of earthly possession is of no avail, and all of hope from the treasures and promises of the world is cast overboard as worthless, and unavailing, then again do we see, as it were,

'the two seas meeting,' and drifting those who are merged in their waters in contrary directions, 'some to everlasting life, and some to everlasting shame and contempt.'

And yet this vessel, with its living freight, is no doubt a striking representation of the Lord's family—tossed about in a stormy sea, subject to every vicissitude and alternation of hopes and fears and doubts, casting over this dependance and that, lightening the vessel of every weight and incumbrance that would hinder and delay, and the sin that doth so easily beset; and looking unto Jesus for strong consolation and refuge, and having His everlasting arms beneath them, and His rod and His staff to support and bear them up—not the poor 'broken pieces' of earthly hopes and the shattered fragments of worldly ties, but His truth, His promise, His love, His mercy, nay, and His justice also—they *do all* get safe to land, "to that place of broad rivers and streams, wherein shall go no galley with oars, neither shall gallant ship pass thereby;" for "there shall be no more sea," and no more shipwrecks.

SECTION CXXI.

CHAP. XXVIII. 1—6. *And when they were escaped, then they knew that the island was called Melita. And the*

barbarous people shewed us no little kindness: for they kindled a fire, and received us every one, because of the present rain, and because of the cold. And when Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks, and laid them on the fire, there came a viper out of the heat, and fastened on his hand. And when the barbarians saw the venomous beast hang on his hand, they said among themselves, No doubt this man is a murderer, whom, though he hath escaped the sea, yet vengeance suffereth not to live. And he shook off the beast into the fire, and felt no harm. Howbeit they looked when he should have swollen, or fallen down dead suddenly: but after they had looked a great while, and saw no harm come to him, they changed their minds, and said that he was a god.

THE island on which these shipwrecked mariners were cast was soon discovered to be Melita, or our modern Malta, one of those many offshoots of Phœnician origin; and the "certain creek into which they were minded to run the ship" is known to this day by the name of "St. Paul's Bay."

But, though life was spared, and all had escaped safe to land, still the circumstances in which they were placed were sad and dreary enough: the season itself began to exhibit the cold of coming winter, the rain was still pouring down, and, as all had got to shore through the surf and the waves, the clothes of everyone must have been dripping wet. But providentially it was not an uninhabited island, and, what was still more providential, its inhabitants were most friendly and hospitable, as prompt to supply every need as

they happily had the means. They are very incorrectly called here 'barbarians;' and our own land has unhappily, even in recent times, shown what barbarians can do when an unfortunate vessel has been stranded on their shore. The phrase, however, in itself is incorrectly translated, and, though barbarians would more strictly apply to those of our own country, on our own shores, to whom a wreck is a harvest, still, in ancient phraseology, a 'barbarian' simply signified a foreigner, in distinction to a Greek. The statement, indeed, in this verse is so incongruous in itself, in "barbarous people shewing us no little kindness," that one wonders the translator was not struck with the juxta-position of two such contradictory terms.*

Fire, of course, was the first thing most essential to the comfort of these shipwrecked mariners, and that was the first thing thought of and provided by these hospitable islanders, even on the very shore. And there is something striking in the fact that, of all that large body of men whose lives had just been preserved from destruction, Paul is the only one named as prominently active and untiring in promoting the general good. He could not have been ignorant of the cruel purpose

* So late, indeed, as Shakspeare we find the word 'barbarian' used for 'foreigner:'—

"I would they were barbarians, as they are,
Though in Rome littered."—*Shaksp., Coriol.*

of the soldiers in wishing to put him to death in their disappointed rage, nor that they had been prevented from executing it only by the authority and influence of Julius. And yet the very first act in which we find him engaged is, not crouching over the fire for some warmth to his own benumbed and chilled limbs, not looking on in selfish indifference while others toiled, but himself gathering fuel wherever he could find it, and laying it on the fire. A willing heart finds always a ready hand; and the Christian spirit of the Apostle was as prompt to supply the need of those who had been so ready to kill him as if every thought of their hearts had been only kindness and humanity.

It was in performing these offices of good-will and love to his fellow-sufferers that the incident of the viper occurred as recorded here. It has been customary to speak disparagingly of the remarks of these islanders on the occasion, as betokening a low state of intellect, and an unusual amount of superstitious feeling. I confess it does not strike me in that light, and that most heathen in those days would have expressed very similar opinions. Of course, it is taken for granted that the animal was a venomous one, whose bite was known to be fatal, and that Paul was actually bitten; in fact, the narrative implies as much. Nor am I sure that if in our own days we had seen a similar event occur some such thought and feeling would not have darted into our own minds—that the

righteous retribution of the Almighty was pursuing such an one, and though He might permit him for a moment to escape from the overwhelming billows, yet there was no shelter from the just judgment of God. And I think, moreover, that if we had reasoned so, we should have had God's own Word on our side. What does the Prophet Amos say? "Though they dig into hell, thence shall mine hand take them; though they climb up into heaven, thence will I bring them down: and though they hide themselves in the top of Carmel, I will search and take them out thence; and though they be hid from my sight in the bottom of the sea, *thence will I command the serpent, and he shall bite them*" (Amos ix. 2, 3): and in another passage he supposes a man fleeing from a lion, and a bear meets him, and, when he rushes into a house to escape from the bear, "a serpent out of the wall bit him;" or, as Job describes "a man fleeing from the iron weapon, and the bow of steel strikes him through." The inference, therefore, of these islanders was a natural one, though incorrect in its application to Paul; and, as regards their sudden change of opinion when they saw no harm happening to him, it was the very judgment formed by the inhabitants of Lystra when Paul had healed the cripple at their temple-gate, and they too said, 'The gods are come down to us in the likeness of men.' It was undoubtedly no god in the likeness

of sinful men that had come to these shores of Melita, but it was a man of God, a messenger sent from heaven, to tell them of One who *had come* in the likeness of men, and was found in fashion as a man, and had become obedient unto death, even the death of the cross; and one can little doubt that this miracle of Paul's escape from the poisonous venom of the reptile was intended of God for purposes of mercy to many in the island.

SECTION CXXII.

CHAP. XXVIII. 7—10. *In the same quarters were possessions of the chief man of the island, whose name was Publius: who received us, and lodged us three days courteously. And it came to pass, that the father of Publius lay sick of a fever, and of a bloody flux: to whom Paul entered in, and prayed, and laid his hands on him, and healed him. So, when this was done, others also, which had diseases in the island, came, and were healed: who also honoured us with many honours; and when we departed, they laded us with such things as were necessary.*

THIS shipwreck necessarily involved a detention of three months in the island, till the return of the spring released vessels from their winter moorings, and permitted them to resume their traffic. Under ordinary circumstances such a delay from such a cause, in a strange island,

without friends or acquaintances, would be peculiarly irksome and tedious; and to a prisoner in bonds, under the odium of a criminal charge, one could hardly imagine a more painful and wearisome position. But as God's servant found work to do in the dungeon at Philippi, and in his lengthened imprisonment at Cesarea, so Paul found openings and opportunities of usefulness at Melita also.

There can be little doubt that Paul was left very much to his own liberty and choice—probably even without the customary restraint of being bound with a chain to a soldier, who accompanied him wherever he went. There could be no fear of escape from an island under their present circumstances, and, in all probability, Paul's influence and credit were higher than ever from the accurate fulfilment of every word he had uttered, and the manifest honour which God had put upon His servant, and His recent miraculous interposition in his favour. Nor was Paul's a heart likely to remain cold and indifferent, or shut up within itself, when he saw that there was work given him to do. Like the Psalmist, his heart, too, would be hot within him, and he would burn to speak and tell of that Name above every name, and which, in all probability, had never yet been heard nor mentioned in that little Mediterranean isle, to which the Lord in His providence, and by His mes-

senger the tempest, had now driven them. God's ways in the natural world are very often the same: the storm and the hurricane, the blasts of the wind and the currents of the ocean, are frequently the means by which God sends precious seed from one land to another—it is drifted or dropped there, as it were, by chance; but it takes root, and in a few generations the alien seed has become the indigenous produce of the land.

We do not, indeed, read of Paul preaching at Melita, but we do read of his 'praying'—praying in a sick man's chamber, and praying for his recovery. And to whom would he pray, in whose name would he offer up prayer, and hope to be heard for that Name's sake, and in whose name would he lay his hands upon the diseased and heal them? And can we for a moment think that Paul, who made himself servant to all, that he might gain the more, and was made all things to all men, that he might by all means gain some, would belie his own precept and not "preach the word," not "be instant in season and out of season,"—that he would tell them Jesus was mighty to heal the body, and be silent as to the sin-diseased soul; and that when through the Lord's providence "a great door and effectual was opened unto him," he would himself slam it to, and refuse to enter in, or admit others to an entrance?

We can have no doubt that Paul preached

Christ crucified to these Maltese islanders, and though tares have, through an enemy's sowing, since grown up among the seed that was first drifted to its shores on that night of storm, when a poor shipwrecked prisoner stood shivering over a fire kindled on the beach, and a viper fastened on his hand,—yet, still from that day, that seed sown in faith and committed unto God, has never perished out of the land, and Malta owes its first knowledge of Christian truth to the preaching of the Apostle Paul. And where his missionary foot first trod, and his missionary voice was first heard, there, by a singularly happy consistency, does the Malta Protestant College prepare and train her missionaries now for the spreading of that Gospel, and in those Eastern lands where Paul himself once planted it. I do not know that we need rely in any great measure on tradition, yet it is worth naming that tradition does record that Publius, "the chief man of the island," whose father was healed of a painful and wasting malady by the laying on of the Apostle's hands, became himself a convert; and as in his heathen condition he was the Protos, or chief man of the island, so is he said to have been its first Christian Bishop and martyr.

"Lacked ye anything?" said our Lord to His disciples on their return from their first missionary labours, and they said, "Nothing;" and how often is it that at the moment of need the supply

comes in a way and by a channel of which the recipient never dreamed. It was so with the child Jesus and His parents, when they were directed to flee into Egypt, and the treasures of the wise men supplied the means. Paul and his companions were shipwrecked in a land of strangers, and compelled to remain three months in a strange land, and the Lord again provided all things necessary, not for their stay only, but for their future voyage.

JEHOVAH JIREH, "The Lord will provide," is His Name.

SECTION CXXIII.

CHAP. XXVIII. 11—15. *And after three months we departed in a ship of Alexandria, which had wintered in the isle, whose sign was Castor and Pollux. And landing at Syracuse, we tarried there three days. And from thence we fetched a compass, and came to Rhegium: and after one day the south wind blew, and we came the next day to Puteoli; where we found brethren, and were desired to tarry with them seven days: and so we went toward Rome. And from thence, when the brethren heard of us, they came to meet us as far as Appii Forum, and The Three Taverns; whom when Paul saw, he thanked God, and took courage.*

WE are now, as it were, embarking with Paul on

his last voyage—the last that this book of "The Acts of the Apostles" records. The winter and the stormy season had now passed, and with returning spring navigation again began, and the sea once more opened its highway for nations to pass over. It was another cornship of Alexandria, on board of which the centurion embarked his soldiers and prisoners. It is with ships, and with them that go down to the sea in ships, and that do business in great waters, as it is with men in the field or house, or with women at the mill: two shall be sailing on the trackless deep on the same errand, buoyant with the same hopes, and hastening to the same haven—the one is taken, the other left. The vessel, on board of which Paul and his companions were, foundered in sight of shore; the other Alexandrian ship, perhaps driven by the same storm, had reached in safety, remained through the winter in the security of its harbour, and was now preparing to set sail with its freight for Puteoli.

Under the supposed happy auspices of those tutelary deities of sailors, Castor and Pollux, or those bright and glittering stars, "The Twins," or "Gemini," the ship was now to proceed on her course. One wonders not that heathen mariners felt especial protection in a vessel bearing such a name: an English sailor, I suspect, who looks on a Friday as an unlucky day on which to

begin a voyage, has great faith in the magic of a name, and would probably think that a vessel called the Speed-well would arrive sooner at its destination than one named the Sluggard or the Sloth, or that one bearing the name of Providence, or the Protector, would ride more safely through a storm than one that should be called the Rock or the Reef. This feeling with regard to names has ever been in the human mind from the day that a man-child was first born into the world, and Eve, in her mistaken joy, called her son Cain and said, "I have gotten a man from the Lord:" or when Rachel perpetuated the bitterness of her heart by calling her son Ben-oni, "son of my grief," or another mother in Israel named her child Ichabod, saying, "The glory is departed from Israel."

The vessel, however, in which Paul was did not belie its name, nor the supposed favourable character of its guardian deities; and they made so quick a run to Syracuse their first port, about 100 miles from Crete, that they were enabled to stay there three days. We are not told whether Paul had liberty to go on shore, as he had at Sidon, but we can have little doubt that it was so. Paul had undoubtedly from the very first much influence over Julius, and over the other soldiers also, and though with them there had been a momentary revulsion of feeling while their vessel was being actually dashed to pieces, yet they

could not have remained three whole months in his daily company, witnessing his daily life, and hearing his daily conversation, witnesses too of those miracles of healing, which the power of God enabled him to perform, and enjoying, no doubt, during their tedious detention on the island, and now on their renewed voyage, the benefits of his influence in the many kindnesses shown to them for his sake, one can little doubt that Paul, though in name a prisoner, was looked up to with reverential regard and respect, and that no restriction was imposed on any wish he might express. There is, indeed, a tradition that Paul did preach the Gospel to the Syracusans, and I see no reason to doubt it. I should, indeed, far more readily doubt the supposition that, with the opportunity in his power, Paul did not avail himself of it, and that for three whole days he cast his eyes over those fair Sicilian fields, already white for the harvest, and forbore to thrust in his sickle.

The wind would appear to have been slightly against them on quitting Syracuse, and so beating up against it they reached Rhegium, and after quitting that, meeting with a favourable wind, on the next day they finished their voyage at Puteoli on the eastern side of the bay of Naples. No doubt Paul would gaze with an eye of adoration and praise, as he looked on the fair scene around, which even then and ever since has drawn

forth the unceasing admiration of every traveller. But though his eye might wander over places and scenes now familiar to ourselves, as they were to travellers then in those days of even still more crowded resort, his heart would be far away on that city to which he was wending his way, and thinking of the reception that might perchance await him there. How different his arrival now from what it might have been, and what he had hoped and meant it should have been. A prisoner in bonds! appealing from the wrongs and outrage of his own countrymen to a heathen judicature! would they greet him as a brother? would an open or a closed door, open or barred hearts, be his lot? No doubt his heart was disquieted within him; no doubt anxious, if not desponding thoughts disturbed him, as he thought of his entrance into Rome a solitary man in bonds. But the Lord was merciful to His servant: at Puteoli he met with Christian intercourse and sympathy during a whole week that he stayed there; and, on reaching Appii Forum, about fifty miles from Rome, the Apostle was surprised and gratified by the sight of many Christian friends, some, no doubt, whose features were familiar to him, perhaps Aquila and Priscilla among them, and some on whom he gazed for the first time, but in whose looks he read only sympathy and love, who had come out that lengthened distance to greet, and escort him into Rome. And again

the Three Taverns, about ten or twelve miles * further on the road, another and a later body of sympathizing friends met him there also. How striking the expression, "Whom when Paul saw, he thanked God and took courage"! and how often has the same been realized in the experience of many a sorrowing and desponding child in the Lord's family.

"Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take,
The clouds ye so much dread
Are big with mercy, and will break
In blessings on your head."

SECTION CXXIV.

CHAP. XXVIII. 16—22. *And when we came to Rome, the centurion delivered the prisoners to the captain of the guard: but Paul was suffered to dwell by himself with a soldier that kept him. And it came to pass, that after three days Paul called the chief of the Jews together: and when they were come together, he said unto them, Men and brethren, though I have committed nothing against the people, or customs of our fathers, yet was I delivered prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans. Who, when they had examined me, would have let me go, because there was no cause of death in me. But when the Jews spake against it, I was constrained to appeal unto Cæsar; not that I had ought to accuse my nation of. For this cause therefore have I called for you, to see*

* Mr. Lewin, quoting from the Itinerary of Antoninus, makes the distance eighteen miles.

you, and to speak with you: because that for the hope of Israel I am bound with this chain. And they said unto him, We neither received letters out of Judæa concerning thee, neither any of the brethren that came shewed or spake any harm of thee. But we desire to hear of thee what thou thinkest: for as concerning this sect, we know that every where it is spoken against.

PAUL had now entered Rome; and though in one sense he entered it as a prisoner in bonds, God had so mercifully ordered all things that for the last fifty miles of his route his journey was more that of a triumphant conqueror, or rather that of some just and beneficent magistrate returning from his government, and whom friends and strangers alike united to honour, and had gone forth to welcome and escort into the capitol. All this, no doubt, tended to the encouragement of the Apostle, as he recognized the Lord's loving hand in all; and would no doubt materially add to the high estimation in which he was already held by the Centurion, and influence the report he would give in to the Prætorian Prefect, or as he is here called "the captain of the guard," into whose custody prisoners of this class were consigned.

The name of Afranius Burrhus has come down to us, through other channels, as the officer here alluded to, and history has recorded of him that he was a mild and just and honourable man, and that it was through his influence and counsel chiefly that those early years of Nero's reign were

so marked by apparent beneficence and mildness; and when at length the mask was thrown aside, and Nero's true character developed in all its hideous and contemptible colours, Burrhus was among the earliest victims of his ingratitude and cruelty. It was, however, a merciful appointment of the Lord's providential care, that consigned His servant to such custody; nor do we find that during the whole period of his imprisonment at Rome, extending through two whole years, any restriction, beyond that which Roman laws never dispensed with, his being continually bound by a chain to a soldier who accompanied him wherever he went, was ever exercised against him, and instead of being confined within the rude and noisy precincts of a soldier's camp, he was permitted to occupy a hired lodging of his own, and there receive such friends and acquaintances as he pleased, and occupy himself in such employments as he wished, no man forbidding, no one interfering with him.

We see what was the chief thought which occupied the Apostle's mind, probably ever since that day when he first stood before Festus in the Prætorium at Cesarea, when the Jews laid so many complaints against him which they were not able to prove, and he had in self-defence been compelled to appeal to Cæsar's judgment-seat. And this thought, no doubt, had deepened in anxiety and intenseness as he drew near to

Rome, and as he at length entered that city through the Capenian Gate. It was his earnest love, the intense desire and prayer of his heart to God for Israel, that they might be saved; his readiness even to be separated himself and cut off from all communion with the saints of Christ on earth, if by any means he could win over his own brethren, his kinsmen according to the flesh, and his unfeigned fear lest, by appealing to Cæsar's judgment-seat, he might seem to cast reproach upon them, and so hinder his usefulness among them. These must have been the thoughts and feelings that were uppermost in his mind, and which he was so anxious to set at rest. He loses therefore no time in calling them together that they may hear his statement. The remainder of the day on which he entered Rome would no doubt be occupied with his transfer from the custody of Julius to that of Burrhus, and other legal processes: the next day would be occupied in seeking a lodging, and other necessary matters; and on the third, "after three days," he calls the chief of the Jews together, and explains to them the circumstances under which his appeal had been made, and which had now brought him to Rome, "bound," as they themselves saw, "with this chain."

In fact it was the Jews' own act—his heathen judge would have acquitted him, he found no cause of death in him, and would have let him go —but his own people, his own countrymen spake

against it, and no alternative was left him, but he "was constrained to appeal unto Cæsar." It is a striking testimony which these Jews give to Paul; and though no doubt they chiefly refer to the appeal to Cæsar of which they could hardly have heard in any of the usual channels, yet they do speak of brethren who had actually come from Judæa to Rome, and yet not one had spoken unkindly or harshly or in any way to the prejudice of the Apostle. They were indeed desirous to hear from Paul his opinions on this new faith, which was so universally maligned and spoken against; and though their language had somewhat of the wonted contempt of Jewish prejudice and bigotry, one must not withhold from them that praise to which at least they are entitled, that they would not condemn either the Apostle or the doctrine he preached unheard. So that in reality at Rome as elsewhere Paul preached to the Jews first and afterwards to the Gentiles. He fulfilled his Lord's injunctions, as well as the dictates of his own loving heart, in seeking out first the lost sheep of the House of Israel.

SECTION CXXV.

CHAP. XXVIII. 23—31. *And when they had appointed him a day, there came many to him into his lodging; to whom he expounded and testified the kingdom of God, persuading*

them concerning Jesus, both out of the law of Moses, and out of the prophets, from morning till evening. And some believed the things which were spoken, and some believed not. And when they agreed not among themselves, they departed, after that Paul had spoken one word, Well spake the Holy Ghost by Esaias the prophet unto our fathers, saying, Go unto this people, and say, Hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and not perceive: for the heart of this people is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed; lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them. Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it. And when he had said these words, the Jews departed, and had great reasoning among themselves. And Paul dwelt two whole years in his own hired house, and received all that came in unto him, preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ with all confidence, no man forbidding him.

THIS day's gathering in Paul's hired lodging, when many flocked together to hear him "expound and testify of the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus both out of the Law and the Prophets," reminds one in some measure of that Sabbath-day at Antioch in Pisidia, when after the religious services of the day in the synagogue, many of the Jews and religious proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas to their home, "who speaking to them persuaded them to continue in the grace of God." Or, perhaps, it may recall that meeting at Troas in

the upper chamber on the day before his departure from them, "ready to depart on the morrow," when he continued his speech until midnight. So here from morning till evening this earnest preacher continued to testify of the kingdom of God, and, like his own blessed Master on the road to Emmäus, "beginning at Moses and all the Prophets he expounded unto them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Jesus."

The Holy Spirit has not recorded for our edification either the discourse of Jesus to his two disciples or that of his servant Paul; but we need them not, for we have that very Moses and those very Prophets, whose pages Paul unrolled, and with our own eyes and our own hands we may trace the unbroken line of prophecy from its first dim twilight in the garden of Eden to the full blaze of noon-day brightness in the predictions of the Psalms and the pages of the Prophets, and ere we close the roll we too can gratefully give utterance to the glorious truth and say, "The spirit of prophecy is indeed the testimony of Jesus."

And yet to how many even now as then is the Word of God a sealed book! Over how many eyes or how many hearts is that veil spread, of which that Prophet speaks, whose words so accurately described the scene at Golgotha and on Calvary! With what sorrow of heart must the Apostle

have turned to that section of his hearers still unconvinced, still hardened and still hardening themselves, as he uttered this prophetic reproach, which they no doubt as little thought they were at that day fulfilling as the scorners of these last days think they are accomplishing God's Word now.

Yet we cannot doubt that on many a heart that day the Word descended like rain on the mown grass, or as the dew on the tender herb: and that even of those who left that room apparently unconvinced, the Apostle's words had found their way through some opened crevice, and were unconsciously taking root. It was not as with the seed sown on the way-side, which the devourer instantly caught up and destroyed, but it remained with them after they had departed; there was much reasoning among themselves, much inquiry, and we may fain hope the work did not stop there, but that through the grace of God the seed sown that day in Paul's lodging with such untiring love and such unsparing hand did not altogether prove unfruitful even in those that went away unbelieving, and that in the Lord's own time it brought forth fruit, some perhaps it may be only thirty, but some also sixty, and it may be in some "hidden ones," here and there, even an hundred fold.

We now part from the Apostle—with the brief intimation that he remained for two whole years

in his own hired lodging—still a prisoner, but with such little restriction exercised towards him, through the kind agency of Burrhus while he lived, and the real providence of God, that though we know not and never shall know till the great harvest-day the abundant produce gathered into the Lord's garner, still we have every reason to be assured that that period of imprisonment and bonds was in reality as valuable and profitable a portion of the Apostle's ministry as those more active days when from country to country and from continent to continent, or from city to city, or, as in Ephesus, from house to house he laboured more abundantly than all, and had the daily care of all the churches.

Many a servant of the Lord, apparently laid aside from active work by illness, or other providential hindrance, may mourn over the dispensation that bids his hands hang down and his knees be feeble while he sees others pressing onwards, and himself seeming to lag behind, and to have no opening for usefulness, no field of labour in which at least he may plough and sow, even though he do not reap—no sphere of active ministry, in which the strong current of his heart's affections may find an outlet while he testifies of Jesus, no spot on which he may once more take his stand and preach "the kingdom of God"—his voice silent and his heart sorrowing. But let such an one in his sadness and disappointment think of Paul, a prisoner

his bonds, still doing what he could, and e Lord prospering and approving his work; let m imitate the Psalmist in his submission, "be umb and open not his mouth, for it is the Lord's ing," and remember that in His wise and acious appointment and arrangement of His mily and household,—

"They also serve who only stand and wait."

FINIS.

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